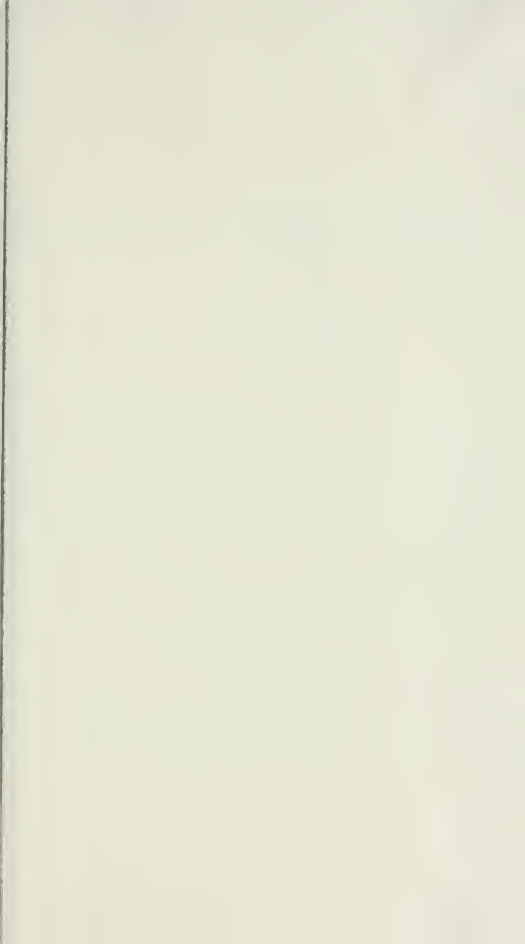




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THE

"BRITISH PROSE WRITERS."

VOL. XV.

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III

DR. JOHNSON'S SERMONS.

LONDON :

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DR JOHNSON'S SERMON

VOL. I.



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THE limits of this publication cannot embrace the *Theological Works* of the BRITISH PROSE WRITERS : but an exception may, with propriety, be made in favour of the *Sermons of a Layman*, and one so eminent as the AUTHOR of the RAMBLER. Other reasons may be alleged for their insertion among the present volumes : although numerous editions of DR. JOHNSON'S works are in circulation, but few, comparatively, of his readers, are aware that these sermons have not hitherto been admitted into any of them : but above all, the subjects on which they treat, and the pen from which they flowed, indisputably rank them with the original writings of Bacon and Boyle, of Clarendon and Locke.



DR. JOHNSON'S SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF GENESIS, AND THE
FORMER PART OF THE 24TH VERSE.

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his
mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.*

THAT society is necessary to the happiness of human nature, that the gloom of solitude, and the stillness of retirement, however they may flatter at a distance, with pleasing views of independence and serenity, neither extinguish the passions nor enlighten the understanding; that discontent will intrude upon privacy, and temptations follow us to the desert; every one may be easily convinced, either by his own experience, or that of others. That knowledge is advanced by an intercourse of sentiments and an exchange of observations, and that the bosom is disburdened by a communication of its cares, is too well known for proof or illustration. In solitude, perplexity swells into distraction, and grief settles into melancholy; even the satisfactions and pleasures, that may by chance be found, are but imperfectly enjoyed, when they are enjoyed without participation.

How high this disposition may extend, and how far society may contribute to the felicity of more exalted natures, it is not easy to determine, nor necessary to inquire ; it seems, however, probable, that this inclination is allotted to all rational beings of limited excellence, and that it is the privilege only of the infinite Creator to derive all his happiness from himself.

It is a proof of the regard of God for the happiness of mankind, that the means by which it must be attained are obvious and evident ; that we are not left to discover them by difficult speculations, intricate disquisitions, or long experience ; but are led to them, equally by our passions and our reason, in prosperity and distress. Every man perceives his own insufficiency to supply himself with what either necessity or convenience require, and applies to others for assistance. Every one feels his satisfaction impaired by the suppression of pleasing emotions, and consequently endeavours to find an opportunity of diffusing his satisfaction.

As a general relation to the rest of the species is not sufficient to procure gratifications for the private desires of particular persons ; as closer ties of union are necessary to promote the separate interests of individuals, the great society of the world is divided into different communities, which are again subdivided into smaller bodies, and more contracted associations, which pursue, or ought to pursue, a particular interest, in subordination to the public good, and consistently with the general happiness of mankind.

Each of these subdivisions produces new dependences and relations, and every particular relation gives rise to a particular scheme of duties ;

duties which are of the utmost importance and of the most sacred obligation, as the neglect of them would defeat all the blessings of society, and cut off even the hope of happiness ; as it would poison the fountain whence it must be drawn ; and make those institutions, which have been formed as necessary to peace and satisfaction, the means of disquiet and misery.

The lowest subdivision of society, is that by which it is broken into private families ; nor do any duties demand more to be explained and enforced, than those which this relation produces ; because none is more universally obligatory, and, perhaps, very few are more frequently neglected.

The universality of these duties requires no other proof than may be received from the most cursory and superficial observation of human life. Very few men have it in their power to injure society in a large extent ; the general happiness of the world can be very little interrupted by the wickedness of any single man, and the number is not large of those by whom the peace of any particular nation can be disturbed ; but every man may injure a family, and produce domestic disorders and distresses ; almost every one has opportunities, and perhaps, sometimes temptations, to rebel as a wife, or tyrannize as a husband ; and therefore, to almost every one are those admonitions necessary, that may assist in regulating the conduct, and impress just notions of the behaviour which these relations exact.

Nor are these obligations more evident than the neglect of them ; a neglect of which daily examples may be found, and from which daily calamities arise. Almost all the miseries of life, almost all the

wickedness that infects, and all the distresses that afflict mankind, are the consequences of some defects in these duties. It is, therefore, no objection to the propriety of discoursing upon them, that they are well known and generally acknowledged; for a very small part of the disorders of the world proceed from ignorance of the laws by which life ought to be regulated; nor do many, even of those whose hands are polluted by the foulest crimes, deny the reasonableness of virtue, or attempt to justify their own actions. Men are not blindly betrayed into corruption, but abandon themselves to their passions with their eyes open; and lose the direction of Truth, because they do not attend to her voice, not because they do not hear or do not understand it. It is, therefore, no less useful to rouse the thoughtless, than instruct the ignorant; to awaken the attention, than enlighten the understanding.

There is another reason, for which it may be proper to dwell long upon these duties, and return frequently to them; that deep impressions of them may be formed and renewed, as often as time or temptation shall begin to erase them. Offences against society in its greater extent, are cognizable by human laws. No man can invade the property, or disturb the quiet of his neighbour, without subjecting himself to penalties, and suffering in proportion to the injuries he has offered. But cruelty and pride, oppression and partiality, may tyrannize in private families without control: meekness may be trampled on, and piety insulted, without any appeal, but to conscience and to Heaven. A thousand methods of torture may be invented, a thousand acts of unkindness or disregard may be committed,

a thousand innocent gratifications may be denied, and a thousand hardships imposed, without any violation of national laws. Life may be imbittered with hourly vexation; and weeks, months, and years be lingered out in misery, without any legal cause of separation, or possibility of judicial redress. Perhaps, no sharper anguish is felt than that which cannot be complained of, nor any greater cruelties inflicted than some which no human authority can relieve.

That marriage itself, an institution designed only for the promotion of happiness, and for the relief of the disappointments, anxieties, and distresses, to which we are subject in our present state, does not always produce the effects for which it was appointed; that it sometimes condenses the gloom which it was intended to dispel, and increases the weight which was expected to be made lighter by it, must, however unwillingly, be yet acknowledged.

It is to be considered to what causes, effects so unexpected and unpleasing, so contrary to the end of the institution, and so unlikely to arise from it, are to be attributed: it is necessary to inquire, whether those that are thus unhappy, are to impute their misery to any other cause than their own folly, and to the neglect of those duties, which prudence and religion equally require.

This inquiry may not only be of use in stating and explaining the duties of the marriage state, but may contribute to free it from licentious misrepresentations and weak objections, which, indeed, can have little force upon minds not already adapted to receive impressions from them, by habits of debauchery; but which, when they coope-

rate with lewdness, intemperance, and vanity; when they are proposed to an understanding naturally weak, and made yet weaker by luxury and sloth, by an implicit resignation to reigning follies, and an habitual compliance with every appetite; may, at least, add strength to prejudices, to support an opinion already favoured; and, perhaps, hinder conviction, or, at least, retard it.

It may, indeed, be asserted, to the honour of marriage, that it has few adversaries among men, either distinguished for their abilities or eminent for their virtue. Those who have assumed the province of attacking it, of overturning the constitution of the world, of encountering the authority of the wisest legislators, from whom it has received the highest sanction of human wisdom; and subverting the maxims of the most flourishing states, in which it has been dignified with honours and promoted with immunities; those who have undertaken the task of contending with reason and experience, with earth and with heaven, are men who seem generally not selected by nature for great attempts or difficult undertakings: they are, for the most part, such as owe not their determinations to their arguments, but their arguments to their determinations; disputants, animated, not by a consciousness of truth, but by the number of their adherents; and heated, not with zeal for the right, but with the rage of licentiousness and impatience of restraint. And, perhaps, to the sober, the understanding, and the pious, it may be sufficient to remark, that religion and marriage have the same enemies.

There are, indeed, some in other communions of

the Christian church, who censure marriage upon different motives, and prefer celibacy to a state more immediately devoted to the honour of God, and the regular and assiduous practice of the duties of religion; and have recommended vows of abstinence, no where commanded in Scripture, and imposed restraints upon lawful desires; of which, it is easy to judge how well they are adapted to the present state of human nature, by the frequent violation of them, even in those societies where they are voluntarily incurred, and where no vigilance is omitted to secure the observation of them.

But the authors of these rigorous and unnatural schemes of life, though certainly misled by false notions of holiness, and perverted conceptions of the duties of our religion, have, at least, the merit of mistaken endeavours to promote virtue, and must be allowed to have reasoned, at least, with some degree of probability, in vindication of their conduct. They were, generally, persons of piety, and sometimes of knowledge; and are, therefore, not to be confounded with the fool, the drunkard, and the libertine. They who decline marriage, for the sake of a more severe and mortified life, are surely to be distinguished from those who condemn it as too rigorous a confinement, and wish the abolition of it in favour of boundless voluptuousness and licensed debauchery.

Perhaps, even the errors of mistaken goodness may be rectified, and the prejudices surmounted, by deliberate attention to the nature of the institution; and certainly, the calumnies of wickedness may be, by the same means, confuted, though its clamours may not be silenced; since commonly, in debates like this, confutation and conviction are

very distant from each other. For that nothing but vice or folly obstructs the happiness of a married life, may be made evident by examining,

First, the nature and end of marriage.

Secondly, the means by which that end is to be obtained.

First, the nature and end of marriage.

The vow of marriage, which the wisdom of most civilized nations has enjoined, and which the rules of the Christian church enjoin, may be properly considered as a vow of perpetual and indissoluble friendship; friendship, which no change of fortune, nor any alteration of external circumstances, can be allowed to interrupt or weaken. After the commencement of this state, there remain no longer any separate interests; the two individuals become united, and are, therefore, to enjoy the same felicity, and suffer the same misfortunes; to have the same friends, and the same enemies; the same success, and the same disappointments. It is easy, by pursuing the parallel between friendship and marriage, to show how exact a conformity there is between them; to prove that all the precepts laid down with respect to the contraction, and the maxims advanced with regard to the effects, of friendship, are true of marriage, in a more literal sense and a stricter acceptation.

It has long been observed, that friendship is to be confined to one; or that, to use the words of the axiom, "He that hath friends, has no friend*." That ardour of kindness, that unbounded confi-

* *ὁ ἔχων φίλους οὐκ ἔχει φίλον.*

dence, that unsuspecting security which friendship requires, cannot be extended beyond a single object. A divided affection may be termed benevolence, but can hardly rise to friendship; for the narrow limits of the human mind allow it not intensely to contemplate more than one idea. As we love one more, we must love another less; and, however impartially we may, for a very short time, distribute our regards, the balance of affection will quickly incline, perhaps, against our consent, to one side or the other. Besides, though we should love our friends *equally*, which is, perhaps, *not* possible; and *each* according to their *merit*, which is *very difficult*; what shall secure them from jealousy of each other? Will not each think highly of his own value, and imagine himself rated below his worth? Or what shall preserve their common friend from the same jealousy with regard to them? As he divides his affection and esteem between them, he can, in return, claim no more than a dividend of theirs; and, as he regards them equally, they may justly rank some other in equality with him: and what, then, shall hinder an endless communication of confidence, which must certainly end in treachery at last? Let these reflections be applied to marriage, and perhaps, polygamy may lose its vindicators.

It is remarked, that “friendship amongst equals is the most lasting;”* and, perhaps, there are few causes to which more unhappy marriages are to be ascribed, than a disproportion between the original condition of the two persons. Difference of con-

* *Amicitia inter pares firmissima.*

dition makes difference of education, and difference of education produces differences of habits, sentiments, and inclinations: thence arise contrary views and opposite schemes, of which the frequent, though not necessary consequences, are debates, disgust, alienation, and settled hatred.

Strict friendship "is to have the same desires and the same aversions."* Whoever is to choose a friend, is to consider, first, the resemblance or the dissimilitude of tempers. How necessary this caution is to be urged as preparatory to marriage, the misery of those who neglect it sufficiently evinces. To enumerate all the varieties of disposition, to which it may on this occasion be convenient to attend, would be a tedious task; but it is, at least, proper to enforce one precept on this head, a precept which was never yet broken without fatal consequences, "Let the religion of the man and woman be the same." The rancour and hatred, the rage and persecution, with which religious disputes have filled the world, need not to be related: every history can inform us, that no malice is so fierce, so cruel, and implacable, as that which is excited by religious discord. It is to no purpose that they stipulate for the free enjoyment of their own opinion; for how can he be happy, who sees the person most dear to him in a state of dangerous error, and ignorant of those sacred truths, which are necessary to the approbation of God and to future felicity? How can he engage not to endeavour to propagate truth, and promote the salvation of those he loves? or, if he has been

* An observation of Catiline in Sallust.

betrayed into such engagements by an ungoverned passion, how can he vindicate himself in the observation of them? The education of children will soon make it necessary to determine, which of the two opinions shall be transmitted to their posterity; and how can either consent to train up in error and delusion, those from whom they expect the highest satisfactions, and the only comforts of declining life?

On account of this conformity of notions, it is, that equality of condition is chiefly eligible; for, as *friendship*, so marriage, *either finds* or makes an equality. No disadvantage of birth or fortune ought to impede the exaltation of virtue and of wisdom; for with marriage begins union, and union obliterates all distinctions. It may, indeed, become the person who received the benefit, to remember it, that gratitude may heighten affection; but the person that conferred it ought to forget it, because, if it was deserved, it cannot be mentioned without injustice, nor, if undeserved, without imprudence: all reproaches of this kind, must be either retractions of a good action, or proclamations of our own weakness.

“Friends,” says the proverbial observation, “have every thing in common.” This is likewise implied in the marriage covenant. Matrimony admits of no separate possessions, no incommunicable interests. This rule, like all others, has been often broken by low views and sordid stipulations; but, like all other precepts founded on reason and in truth, it has received a new confirmation from almost every branch of it; and those parents, whose age has had no better effects upon their under-

standing, than to fill them with avarice and strata-gem, have brought misery and ruin upon their children, by the means which they weakly imagined conducive to their happiness.

There is yet another precept, equally relating to friendship and to marriage; a precept, which, in either case, can never be too strongly inculcated or too scrupulously observed: "Contract friendship only with the good." Virtue is the first quality to be considered in the choice of a friend, and yet more in a fixed and irrevocable choice. This maxim surely requires no comment, nor any vindication; it is equally clear and certain, obvious to the superficial, and incontestable by the most accurate examiner: to dwell upon it, is, therefore, superfluous; for, though often neglected, it never was denied. Every man will, without hesitation, confess, that it is absurd to trust a known deceiver, or voluntarily to depend for quiet and for happiness upon insolence, cruelty, and oppression. Thus, marriage appears to differ from friendship, chiefly in the degree of its efficacy and the authority of its institution: it was appointed by God himself, as necessary to happiness, even in a state of innocence; and the relation produced by it was declared more powerful than that of birth: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." But as, notwithstanding its conformity to human nature, it sometimes fails to produce the effects intended, it is necessary to inquire,

Secondly, by what means the end of marriage is to be attained.

As it appears, by examining the natural system of the universe, that the greatest and smallest bodies are invested with the same properties, and moved by the same laws ; so a survey of the moral world will inform us, that greater or less societies are to be made happy by the same means, and that, however relations may be varied or circumstances changed, virtue, and virtue alone, is the parent of felicity. We can only, in whatsoever state we may be placed, secure ourselves from disquiet and from misery, by a resolute attention to truth and reason : without this, it is in vain that a man chooses a friend, or cleaves to a wife. If passion be suffered to prevail over right, and the duties of our state be broken through or neglected, for the sake of gratifying our anger, our pride, or our revenge, the union of hearts will quickly be dissolved, and kindness will give way to resentment and aversion.

The duties, by the practice of which a married life is to be made happy, are the same with those of friendship, but exalted to higher perfection. Love must be more ardent, and confidence without limits. It is, therefore, necessary, on each part, to deserve that confidence, by the most unshaken fidelity, and to preserve their love unextinguished by continual acts of tenderness ; not only to detest all real, but seeming offences ; and to avoid suspicion and guilt, with almost equal solicitude.

But since the frailty of our nature is such, that we cannot hope from each other an unvaried rectitude of conduct, or an uninterrupted course of wisdom or virtue ; as folly will, sometimes, intrude upon an unguarded hour ; and temptations, by frequent attacks, will, sometimes, prevail ; one of the chief

acts of love is, readily to forgive errors and overlook defects. Neglect is to be reclaimed by kindness, and perverseness softened by complaisance. Sudden starts of passion are patiently to be borne, and the calm moments of recollection silently expected : for, if one offence be made a plea for another ; if anger be to be opposed with anger, and reproach retorted for reproach ; either the contest must be continued for ever, or one must, at last, be obliged, by violence, to do what might have been at first done, not only more gracefully, but with more advantage.

Marriage, however in general it resembles friendship, differs from it in this ; that all its duties are not reciprocal. Friends are equal in every respect ; but the relation of marriage produces authority on one side, and exacts obedience on the other ; obedience, an unpleasing duty, which yet the nature of the state makes indispensable : for friends may separate when they can no longer reconcile the sentiments, or approve the schemes of each other ; but as marriage is indissoluble, either one must be content to submit, when *conviction* cannot be obtained, or life must be wasted in perpetual disputes.

But though obedience may be justly required, servility is not to be exacted ; and though it may be lawful to exert authority, it must be remembered, that to govern and to tyrannize are very different, and that oppression will naturally provoke rebellion.

The great rule, both of authority and obedience, is the law of God ; a law which is not to be broken for the promotion of any ends, or in compliance with any commands ; and which, indeed, never

can be violated, without destroying that confidence, which is the great source of mutual happiness ; for how can that person be trusted, whom no principle obliges to fidelity ?

Thus religion appears, in every state of life, to be the basis of happiness, and the operating power which makes every good institution valid and efficacious : and he that shall attempt to attain happiness by the means which God has ordained, and “ shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife,” shall surely find the highest degree of satisfaction that our present state allows, if, in his choice, he pays the first regard to virtue, and regulates his conduct by the precepts of religion.

SERMON II.

ISAIAH, CHAP. LV. VERSE 7.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

THAT God is a being of infinite-mercy; that he desires not the death of a sinner, nor takes any pleasure in the misery of his creatures; may not only be deduced from the consideration of his nature and his attributes; but, for the sake of those that are incapable of philosophical inquiries, who make far the greatest part of mankind, it is evidently revealed to us in the Scriptures, in which the Supreme Being, the source of life, the author of existence, who spake the word and the world was made, who commanded and it was created, is described as looking down, from the height of infinite felicity, with tenderness and pity, upon the sons of men; inciting them, by soft impulses, to perseverance in virtue, and recalling them, by instruction and punishment, from error and from vice. He is represented as not more formidable for his power than amiable for his mercy; and is introduced as expostulating with mankind upon their obstinacy in wickedness, and warning them, with the highest affection, to avoid those punishments, which

the laws of his government make it necessary to inflict upon the inflexible and disobedient. “Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts:” Mal. iii. 7.—“Make you a new heart, and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Ezek. xviii. 31. His mercy is ever made the chief motive of obedience to him; and with the highest reason inculcated, as the attribute which may animate us most powerfully to an attention to our duty. “If thou, O Lord, wert extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who shall abide it? But there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared.” If God were a Power unmerciful and severe, a rigid exactor of unvaried regularity and unfailing virtue; if he were not to be pleased but with perfection, nor to be pacified after transgressions and offences; in vain would the best men endeavour to recommend themselves to his favour; in vain would the most circumspect watch the motions of his own heart, and the most diligent apply himself to the exercise of virtue: they would only destroy their ease by ineffectual solicitude, confine their hearts with unnecessary restraints, and weary out their lives in unavailing labours. God would not be to be served, because all service would be rejected; it would be much more reasonable to abstract the mind from the contemplation of him, than to have him only before us as an object of terror, as a Being too mighty to be resisted, and too cruel to be implored; a Being, that created men only to be miserable, and revealed himself to them, only to interrupt even the transient and imperfect enjoy-

ments of this life; to astonish them with terror, and to overwhelm them with despair.

But there is mercy with him, therefore shall he be feared. It is reasonable that we should endeavour to please him, because we know that every sincere endeavour will be rewarded by him; that we should use all the means in our power to enlighten our minds and regulate our lives, because our errors, if involuntary, will not be imputed to us; and our conduct, though not exactly agreeable to the divine ideas of rectitude, yet, if approved, after honest and diligent inquiries, by our own consciences, will not be condemned by that God, who judges of the heart, weighs every circumstance of our lives, and admits every real extenuation of our failings and transgressions.

Were there not mercy with him; were he not to be reconciled after the commission of a crime; what must be the state of those who are conscious of having once offended him? A state of gloomy melancholy, or outrageous desperation; a dismal weariness of life, and inexpressible agonies at the thought of death: for what affright or affliction can equal the horrors of that mind, which expects every moment to fall into the hands of implacable Omnipotence?

But the mercy of God extends not only to those who have made his will, in some degree, the rule of their actions, and have only deviated from it by inadvertency, surprise, inattention, or negligence, but even to those that have polluted themselves with studied and premeditated wickedness; that have violated his commands in opposition to con-

viction; and gone on from crime to crime, under a sense of the divine disapprobation.

Even these are not for ever excluded from his favour, but have in their hands means, appointed by himself, of reconciliation to him; means, by which pardon may be obtained, and by which they may be restored to those hopes of happiness, from which they have fallen by their own fault.

The great duty, to the performance of which these benefits are promised, is repentance; a duty, which is of the utmost importance to every man to understand and practise, and which it therefore may be necessary to explain and enforce, by showing,

First, What is the true nature of repentance.

Secondly, What are the obligations to an early repentance.

First, What is the true nature of repentance?

The duty of repentance, like most other parts of religion, has been misrepresented by the weakness of superstition or the artifices of interest. The clearest precepts have been obscured by false interpretations, and one error added to another, till the understanding of men has been bewildered, and their morals depraved, by a false appearance of religion.

Repentance has been made by some to consist in the outward expressions of sorrow for sin, in tears and sighs, in dejection and lamentation.

It must be owned, that where the crime is public, and where others may be in danger of corruption from the example, some public and open de-

clarations of repentance may be proper, if made with decency and propriety, which are necessary to preserve the best actions from contempt and ridicule; but they are necessary only, for the sake of destroying the influence of a bad example, and are no otherwise essential to this duty. No man is obliged to accuse himself of crimes, which are known to God alone: even the fear of hurting others ought often to restrain him from it; since, to confess crimes, may be, in some measure, to teach them; and those may imitate him in wickedness, who will not follow him in his repentance.

It seems here not impertinent to mention the practice of private confession to the priest, indispensably enjoined by the Roman church, as absolutely necessary to true repentance; but which is no where commanded in Scripture, or recommended, otherwise than as a method of disburdening the conscience, for the sake of receiving comfort or instruction; and as such is directed by our own Liturgy.

Thus much, and no more, seems to be implied in the apostle's precept, of "confessing our faults one to another," a precept expressed with such latitude, that it appears only to be one of those which it may be often convenient to observe, but which is to be observed no further than as it may be convenient; for we are left entirely at liberty, what terms, whether general or particular, we shall use in our confessions. The precept, in a literal and rational sense, can be said to direct no more than general acts of humiliation, and acknowledgments of our own depravity.

No man ought to judge of the efficacy of his own

repentance, or the sincerity of another's, by such variable and uncertain tokens, as proceed more from the constitution of the body than the disposition of the mind, or more from sudden passions and violent emotions, than from a fixed temper or settled resolutions. Tears are often to be found where there is little sorrow, and the deepest sorrow without any tears. Even sorrow itself is no other than an accidental, or a secondary part of repentance, which may, and indeed ought to arise from the consciousness of our own guilt; but which is merely a natural and necessary effect, in which choice has very little part, and which, therefore, is no virtue. He that feels no sorrow for sin has indeed great reason to doubt of the sincerity of his own repentance, since he seems not to be truly sensible of his danger and his misery; but he that feels it in the highest degree is not to put confidence in it: he is only to expect mercy upon his reformation.

For reformation is the chief part of repentance; not he that only bewails and confesses, but he that forsakes his sins, repents acceptably to God, that God, who "will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" who will only accept a pure heart and real virtue, not outward forms of grief, or pompous solemnities of devotion. To conceive that any thing can be substituted in the place of reformation, is a dangerous and fatal, though, perhaps, no uncommon, error; nor is it less erroneous, though less destructive, to suppose, that any thing can be added to the efficacy of a good life by a conformity to any extraordinary ceremonies or particular institutions.

To false notions of repentance many nations owe the custom, which prevails amongst them, of retiring in the decline of life to solitudes and cloisters, to atone for wickedness by penance and mortifications. It must, indeed, be confessed, that it may be prudent in a man, long accustomed to yield to particular temptations, to remove himself from them as far as he can, because every passion is more strong or violent, as its particular object is more near. Thus it would be madness in a man, long enslaved by intemperance, to frequent revels and banquets with an intent to reform; nor can it be expected that cruelty and tyranny should be corrected by continuance in high authority.

That particular state which contributes most to excite and stimulate our inordinate passions, may be changed with very good effect; but any retirement from the world does not necessarily precede or follow repentance, because it is not requisite to reformation. A man whose conscience accuses him of having perverted others, seems under some obligations to continue in the world, and to practise virtue in public, that those who have been seduced by his example, may, by his example, be reclaimed.

For reformation includes, not only the forbearance of those crimes of which we have been guilty, and the practice of those duties which we have hitherto neglected, but a reparation, as far as we are able to make it, of all the injuries that we have done, either to mankind in general, or to particular persons. If we have been guilty of the open propagation of error, or the promulgation of falsehood, we must make our recantation no less openly; we

must endeavour, without regard to the shame and reproach to which we may be exposed, to undeceive those whom we have formerly misled. If we have deprived any man of his right, we must restore it to him; if we have aspersed his reputation, we must retract our calumny. Whatever can be done to obviate the ill consequences of our past misconduct, must be diligently and steadily practised. Whoever has been made vicious or unhappy by our fault, must be restored to virtue and happiness, so far as our counsel or fortune can contribute to it.

Let no man imagine that he may indulge his malice, his avarice, or his ambition, at the expense of others; that he may raise himself to wealth and honour by the breach of every law of heaven and earth, then retire laden with the plunder of the miserable, spend his life in fantastic penances or false devotion, and by his compliance with the external duties of religion, atone for withholding what he has torn away from the lawful possessor by rapine and extortion: let him not flatter himself with false persuasions that prayer and mortification can alter the great and invariable rules of reason and justice. Let him not think that he can acquire a right to keep what he had no right to take away, or that frequent prostrations before God will justify his perseverance in oppressing men. Let him be assured, that his presence profanes the temple, and that his prayer will be turned into sin.

A frequent and serious reflection upon the necessity of reparation and restitution, may be very effectual to restrain men from injustice and defamation,

from cruelty and extortion ; for nothing is more certain, than that most propose themselves to die the death of the righteous, and intend, however they may offend God in the pursuit of their interest, or the gratification of their passions, to reconcile themselves to him by repentance. Would men, therefore, deeply imprint upon their minds the true notions of repentance in its whole extent, many temptations would lose their force ; for who would utter a falsehood, which he must shamefully retract, or take away, at the expense of his reputation and his innocence, what, if he hopes for eternal happiness, he must afterwards restore ? Who would commit a crime, of which he must retain the guilt, but lose the advantage ?

There is, indeed, a partial restitution, with which many have attempted to quiet their consciences, and have betrayed their own souls. When they are sufficiently enriched by wicked practices, and leave off to rob from satiety of wealth, or are awakened to reflection upon their own lives by danger, adversity, or sickness, they then become desirous to be at peace with God, and hope to obtain, by refunding part of their acquisitions, a permission to enjoy the rest. In pursuance of this view, churches are built, schools endowed, the poor clothed, and the ignorant educated ; works, indeed, highly pleasing to God, when performed in concurrence with the other duties of religion, but which will never atone for the violation of justice. To plunder one man for the sake of relieving another, is not charity ; to build temples with the gains of wickedness, is to endeavour to bribe the

Divinity. "This ought ye to have done, and not left the other undone." Ye ought, doubtless, to be charitable, but ye ought first to be just.

There are others who consider God as a judge still more easily reconciled to crimes; and therefore perform their acts of atonement after death, and destine their estates to charity, when they can serve the end of luxury or vanity no longer. But whoever he be that has loaded his soul with the spoils of the unhappy, and riots in affluence by cruelty and injustice, let him not be deceived! God is not mocked. Restitution must be made to those who have been wronged, and whatever he withholds from them, he withholds at the hazard of eternal happiness.

An amendment of life is the chief and essential part of repentance. He that has performed that great work needs not disturb his conscience with subtle scruples, or nice distinctions; he needs not recollect, whether he was awakened from the lethargy of sin by the love of God, or the fear of punishment. The Scripture applies to all our passions; and eternal punishments had been threatened to no purpose, if these menaces were not intended to promote virtue.

But as this reformation is not to be accomplished by our own natural power, unassisted by God, we must, when we form our first resolutions of a new life, apply ourselves, with fervour and constancy, to those means which God has prescribed for obtaining his assistance. We must implore a blessing by frequent prayer, and confirm our faith by the Holy Sacrament. We must use all those institutions that contribute to the increase of piety, and

omit nothing that may either promote our progress in virtue, or prevent a lapse into vice. It may be inquired, whether a repentance begun in sickness, and prevented by death from exerting its influence upon the conduct, will avail in the sight of God. To this question it may be answered in general, that as all reformation is begun by a change of the temper and inclinations, which, when altered to a certain degree, necessarily produce an alteration in the life and manners; if God, who sees the heart, sees it rectified in such a manner as would consequently produce a good life, he will accept that repentance.

But it is of the highest importance to those who have so long delayed to secure their salvation, that they lose none of the moments which yet remain; that they omit no act of justice or mercy now in their power; that they summon all their diligence to improve the remains of life, and exert every virtue which they have opportunities to practise: and when they have done all that can possibly be done by them, they cannot yet be certain of acceptance, because they cannot know whether a repentance, proceeding wholly from the fear of death, would not languish and cease to operate, if that fear was taken away.

Since, therefore, such is the hazard and uncertain efficacy of repentance long delayed, let us seriously reflect,

Secondly, upon the obligations to an early repentance.

He is esteemed by the prudent and the diligent to be no good regulator of his private affairs, who

defers till to-morrow what is necessary to be done, and what it is in his power to do, to-day. The obligation would still be stronger, if we suppose that the present is the only day in which he knows it will be in his power. This is the case of every man, who delays to reform his life, and lulls himself in the supineness of iniquity. He knows not that the opportunities he now rejects will ever be again offered him, or that they will not be denied him because he has rejected them. This he certainly knows, that life is continually stealing from him, and that every day cuts off some part of that time which is already perhaps almost at an end.

But the time not only grows every day shorter, but the work to be performed in it more difficult; every hour, in which repentance is delayed, produces something new to be repented of. Habits grow stronger by long continuance, and passions more violent by indulgence. Vice, by repeated acts, becomes almost natural, and pleasures, by frequent enjoyment, captivate the mind almost beyond resistance.

If avarice has been the predominant passion, and wealth has been accumulated by extortion and rapacity, repentance is not to be postponed. Acquisitions, long enjoyed, are with great difficulty quit-
ted; with so great difficulty, that we seldom, very seldom, meet with true repentance in those whom the desire of riches has betrayed to wickedness. Men, who could willingly resign the luxuries and sensual pleasures of a large fortune, cannot consent to live without the grandeur and the homage; and they who would leave all, cannot bear the reproach

which they apprehend from such an acknowledgment of wrong.

Thus are men withheld from repentance, and consequently debarred from eternal felicity; but these reasons, being founded in temporal interest, acquire every day greater strength to mislead us, though not greater efficacy to justify us. A man may, by fondly indulging a false notion, voluntarily forget that it is false, but can never make it true. We must banish every false argument, every known delusion from our minds, before our passions can operate in its favour; and forsake what we know must be forsaken, before we have endeared it to ourselves by long possession. Repentance is always difficult, and the difficulty grows still greater by delay. But let those who have hitherto neglected this great duty, remember, that it is yet in their power, and that they cannot perish everlastingly but by their own choice! Let them, therefore, endeavour to redeem the time lost, and repair their negligence by vigilance and ardour! “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

SERMON III.

PROVERBS, CHAP. XXVIII. VERSE 14.

Happy is the man that feareth alway : but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

THE great purpose of revealed religion is to afford man a clear representation of his dependence on the Supreme Being, by teaching him to consider God as his Creator and Governor, his Father and his Judge. Those to whom Providence has granted the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures have no need to perplex themselves with difficult speculations, to deduce their duty from remote principles, or to enforce it by doubtful motives. The Bible tells us, in plain and authoritative terms, that there is a way to life, and a way to death; that there are acts which God will reward, and acts that he will punish: that with soberness, righteousness, and godliness, God will be pleased; and that with intemperance, iniquity, and impiety, God will be offended; and that, of those who are careful to please him, the reward will be such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; and of those who, having offended him, die without repentance, the punishment will be inconceivably severe and dreadful.

In consequence of this general doctrine, the

whole system of moral and religious duty is expressed, in the language of Scripture, by the "fear of God." A good man is characterised as a man that feareth God; and the fear of the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom; and the text affirms, that "happy is the man that feareth alway."

On the distinction of this fear, into servile and filial, or fear of punishment, or fear of offence, on which much has been superstructed by the casuistical theology of the Romish church, it is not necessary to dwell. It is sufficient to observe, that the religion which makes fear the great principle of action, implicitly condemns all self-confidence, all presumptuous security; and enjoins a constant state of vigilance and caution, a perpetual distrust of our own hearts, a full conviction of our natural weakness, and an earnest solicitude for divine assistance.

The philosophers of the heathen world seemed to hope that man might be flattered into virtue, and therefore told him much of his rank, and of the meanness of degeneracy: they asserted, indeed, with truth, that all greatness was in the practice of virtue; but of virtue their notions were narrow; and pride, which their doctrine made its chief support, was not of power sufficient to struggle with sense or passion.

Of that religion which has been taught from God, the basis is humility; a holy fear, which attends good men through the whole course of their lives, and keeps them always attentive to the motives and consequences of every action; if always unsatisfied with their progress in holiness,

always wishing to advance, and always afraid of falling away.

This fear is of such efficacy to the great purpose of our being, that the wise man has pronounced him happy that fears always ; and declares, that he who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief. Let us, therefore, carefully consider,

First, What he is to fear, whose fear will make him happy.

Secondly, What is that hardness of heart which ends in mischief.

Thirdly, How the heart is hardened. And,

Fourthly, What is the consequence of hardness of heart.

First, We must inquire what he is to fear, whose fear will make him happy.

The great and primary object of a good man's fear is sin ; and, in proportion to the atrociousness of the crime, he will shrink from it with more horror. When he meditates on the infinite perfection of his Maker and his Judge ; when he considers that the heavens are not pure in the sight of God, and yet remembers, that he must in a short time appear before him ; he dreads the contamination of evil, and endeavours to pass through his appointed time with such cautions as may keep him unspotted from the world.

The dread of sin necessarily produces the dread of temptation ; he that wishes to escape the effect, flies likewise from the cause. The humility of a man truly religious seldom suffers him to think himself able to resist those incitements to evil,

which, by the approach of immediate gratifications, may be presented to sense or fancy : his care is not for victory, but safety ; and, when he can *escape* assaults, he does not willingly *encounter* them.

The continual occurrence of temptation, and that imbecility of nature, which every man sees in others and has experienced in himself, seems to have made many doubtful of the possibility of salvation. In the common modes of life, they find that business ensnares, and that pleasure seduces ; that success produces pride, and miscarriage envy ; that conversation consists too often of censure or of flattery ; and, that even care for the interests of friends, or attention to the establishment of a family, generates contest and competition, enmity and malevolence, and at last fills the mind with secular solicitude.

Under the terrors which this prospect of the world has impressed upon them, many have endeavoured to secure their innocence by excluding the possibility of crimes ; and have fled, for refuge from vanity and sin, to the solitude of deserts, where they have passed their time in woods and caverns ; and, after a life of labour and maceration, prayer and penitence, died at last in secrecy and silence.

Many more, of both sexes, have withdrawn, and still withdraw, themselves from crowds, and glitter, and pleasure, to monasteries and convents ; where they engage themselves, by irrevocable vows, in certain modes of life, more or less austere, according to the several institutions ; but all of them comprising many positive hardships, and all prohibiting almost all sensual gratifications. The

fundamental and general principle of all monastic communities is celibacy, poverty, and obedience to the superior. In some, there is a perpetual abstinence from all food that may join delight with nourishment; to which, in others, is added an obligation to silence and solitude;—to suffer, to watch, and to pray, is their whole employment.

Of these, it must be confessed, that they fear always, and that they escape many temptations, to which all are exposed, and by which many fall, who venture themselves into the whirl of human affairs; they are exempt from avarice, and all its concomitants; and, by allowing themselves to possess nothing, they are free from those contests for honour and power, which fill the open world with stratagems and violence. But surely it cannot be said that they have reached the perfection of a religious life: it cannot be allowed, that flight is victory; or that he fills his place in the creation laudably, who does no ill, *only* because he does *nothing*. Those who live upon that which is produced by the labour of others, could not live, if there were none to labour; and, if celibacy could be universal, the race of man must soon have an end.

Of these recluses it may, without uncharitable censure, be affirmed, that they have secured their innocence by the loss of their virtue; that, to avoid the commission of some faults, they have made many duties impracticable; and that, lest they should do what they ought *not* to do, they leave much *undone* which they ought to *do*. They must, however, be allowed to express a just sense of the dangers with which we are sur-

rounded, and a strong conviction of the vigilance necessary to obtain salvation; and it is our business to avoid their errors, and imitate their piety.

He is happy that carries about with him in the world the temper of the cloister; and preserves the fear of doing evil, while he suffers himself to be impelled by the zeal of doing good; who uses the comforts and the conveniences of his condition as though he used them not, with that constant desire of a better state, which sinks the value of earthly things; who can be rich or poor, without pride in riches, or discontent in poverty; who can manage the business of life with such indifference as may shut out from his heart all incitements to fraud or injustice; who can partake the pleasures of sense with temperance, and enjoy the distinctions of honour with moderation; who can pass undefiled through a polluted world; and, among all the vicissitudes of good and evil, "have his heart fixed only where true joys are to be found."

This can only be done, by fearing always, by preserving in the mind a constant apprehension of the divine presence, and a constant dread of the divine displeasure; impressions which the converse of mankind, and the solicitations of sense and fancy, are continually labouring to efface, and which we must therefore renew by all such practices as religion prescribes; and which may be learned from the lives of them, who have been distinguished, as examples of piety, by the general approbation of the Christian world.

The great efficient of union between the soul and its Creator, is prayer; of which the necessity

is such, that St. Paul directs us to “pray without ceasing;” that is, to preserve in the mind such a constant dependence upon God, and such a constant desire of his assistance, as may be equivalent to constant prayer.

No man can pray with ardour of devotion, but he must excite in himself a reverential idea of that Power to whom he addresses his petitions; nor can he suddenly reconcile himself to an action by which he shall displease him, to whom he has been returning thanks for his creation and preservation, and by whom he hopes to be still preserved. He, therefore, who prays often, fortifies himself by a natural effect, and may hope to be preserved in safety, by the stronger aid of divine protection.

Besides the returns of daily and regular prayer, it will be necessary for most men to assist themselves, from time to time, by some particular and unaccustomed acts of devotion. For this purpose, intervals of retirement may be properly recommended, in which the dust of life may be shaken off, and in which the course of life may be properly reviewed, and its future possibilities estimated. At such times, secular temptations are removed, and earthly cares are dismissed; a vain transitory world may be contemplated in its true state; past offences may obtain pardon by repentance; new resolutions may be formed, upon new convictions; the past may supply instruction to the present and to the future; and such preparation may be made for those events which threaten spiritual danger, that temptation cannot easily come unexpected; and interest and pleasure, whenever they renew

their attacks, will find the soul upon its guard, with either caution to avoid, or vigour to repel them.

In these seasons of retreat and recollection, what external helps shall be added must by every one be discreetly and soberly considered. Fasts and other austerities, however they have been brought into disrepute by wild enthusiasm, have been always recommended and always practised by the sincere believers of revealed religion; and, as they have a natural tendency to disengage the mind from sensuality, they may be of great use, as awakeners of holy fear; and they may assist our progress in a good life, while they are considered only as expressions of our love of God, and are not substituted for the love of our neighbours.

As all those duties are to be practised lest the heart should be hardened, we are to consider,

Secondly, What is meant by "hardness of heart."

It is apparent, from the text, that the hardness of heart which betrays to mischief, is contrary to the fear which secures happiness. The fear of God, is a certain tenderness of spirit which shrinks from evil, and the causes of evil; such a sense of God's presence, and such persuasion of his justice, as gives sin the appearance of evil, and therefore excites every effort to combat and escape it.

Hardness of heart, therefore, is a thoughtless neglect of the divine law; such an acquiescence in the pleasures of sense, and such delight in the pride of life, as leaves no place in the mind for meditation on higher things; such an indifference about the last event of human actions, as never

looks forward to a future state ; but suffers the passions to operate with their full force, without any other end than the gratification of the present world.

To men of hearts thus hardened, Providence is seldom wholly inattentive ; they are often called to the remembrance of their Creator, both by blessings and afflictions ; by recoveries from sickness, by deliverances from danger, by loss of friends, and by miscarriage of transactions. As these calls are neglected, the hardness is increased ; and there is danger, lest he whom they have refused to hear, should call them no more.

This state of dereliction is the highest degree of misery ; and, since it is so much to be dreaded, all approaches to it are diligently to be avoided. It is therefore necessary to inquire,

Thirdly, How, or by what causes, the heart is hardened.

The most dangerous hardness of heart is that which proceeds from some enormous wickedness, of which the criminal dreads the recollection, because he cannot prevail upon himself to repair the injury ; or because he dreads the irruption of those images, by which guilt must always be accompanied ; and, finding a temporal ease in negligence and forgetfulness, by degrees confirms himself in stubborn impenitence.

This is the most dreadful and deplorable state of the heart ; but this, I hope, is not very common. That which frequently occurs, though very dangerous, is not desperate ; since it consists, not in the perversion of the will, but in the alienation of the

thoughts ; by such hearts God is not defied, he is only forgotten. Of this forgetfulness, the general causes are worldly cares and sensual pleasures. If there is a man, of whose soul avarice or ambition have complete possession, and who places his hope in riches or advancement, he will be employed in bargains or in schemes, and make no excursion into remote futurity, nor consider the time in which the rich and the poor shall lie down together ; when all temporal advantages shall forsake him, and he shall appear before the supreme tribunal of eternal justice. The slave of pleasure soon sinks into a kind of voluptuous dotage, intoxicated with present delights, and careless of every thing else, his days and his nights glide away in luxury or in vice, and he has no cure, but to keep thought away ; for thought is always troublesome to *him* who lives without his own approbation.

That such men are not roused to the knowledge and the consideration of their real state, will appear less strange, when it is observed, that they are almost always either stupidly or profanely negligent of those external duties of religion, which are instituted to excite and preserve the fear of God. By perpetual absence from public worship, they miss all opportunities, which the pious wisdom of Christianity has afforded them, of comparing their lives with the rules which the Scripture contains ; and awakening their attention to the presence of God, by hearing him invoked, and joining their own voices in the common supplication. That carelessness of the world to come, which first suffered them to omit the duties of devotion, is, by that omission, hourly increased ; and having first neglected the

means of holiness, they in time do not remember them.

A great part of them whose hearts are thus hardened, may justly impute that insensibility to the violation of the sabbath. He that keeps one day in the week holy, has not time to become profligate, before the returning day of recollection reinstates his principles, and renews his caution. This is the benefit of periodical worship. But he, to whom all days are alike, will find *no* day for prayer and repentance.

Many enjoyments, innocent in themselves, may become dangerous by too much frequency; public spectacles, convivial entertainments, domestic games, sports of the field, or gay or ludicrous conversation, all of them harmless, and some of them useful, while they are regulated by religious prudence, may yet become pernicious, when they pass their bounds, and usurp too much of that time which is given us, that we may work out our salvation.

And, surely, whatever may diminish the fear of God, or abate the tenderness of conscience, must be diligently avoided by those who remember what is to be explained

Fourthly, The consequence of hardness of heart.

“He that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.” Whether mischief be considered as immediately signifying wickedness, or misery, the sense is eventually the same. Misery is the effect of wickedness, and wickedness is the cause of misery; and he that hardeneth his heart shall be both wicked and miserable. Wicked he will doubtless

be; for he that has lost the fear of God, has nothing by which he can oppose temptation: he has a breast open and exposed, of which interest or voluptuousness take easy possession; he is the slave of his own desires, and the sport of his own passions; he acts without a rule of action, and he determines without any true principle of judgment. If he who fears always, who preserves in his mind a constant sense of the danger of sin, is yet often assaulted, and sometimes overpowered by temptation; what can be hoped for him, that has the same temptation, without the same defence? He who hardens his heart will certainly be wicked, and it necessarily follows, that he will certainly be miserable. The doom of the obstinate and impenitent sinner is plainly declared; "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Let us all, therefore, watch our thoughts and actions; and that we may not, by hardness of heart, fall into mischief, let us endeavour and pray, that we may be among them that feared always, and by that fear may be prepared for everlasting happiness.

SERMON IV.

ISAIAH, CHAP. LVIII. VERSE 7, 8.

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy re-reward.

IF the necessity of every duty is to be estimated by the frequency with which it is inculcated, and the sanctions by which it is enforced; if the great Law-giver of the universe, whose will is immutable, and whose decrees are established for ever, may be supposed to regard, in a particular manner, the observation of those commands, which seem to be repeated only that they may be strongly impressed, and secured, by an habitual submission, from violation and neglect; there is scarcely any virtue that we ought more diligently to exercise, than that of compassion to the needy and distressed.

If we look into the state of mankind, and endeavour to deduce the will of God from the visible disposition of things, we find no duty more necessary to the support of order and the happiness of society, nor any of which we are more often reminded, by

opportunities of practising it, or which is more strongly urged upon us, by importunate solicitations and affecting objects.

If we inquire into the opinions of those men, on whom God conferred superior wisdom, in the heathen world, all their suffrages will be found united in this great point. Amidst all their wild opinions and chimerical systems, the sallies of unguided imagination and the errors of bewildered reason; they have all endeavoured to evince the necessity of beneficence, and agreed to assign the first rank of excellence to him, who most contributes to improve the happiness, and to soften the miseries of life.

But we, who are blessed with clearer light, and taught to know the will of our Maker, not from long deductions from variable appearances, or intricate disquisitions of fallible reason, but by messengers inspired by himself, and enabled to prove their mission by works above the power of created beings, may spare ourselves the labour of tedious inquiries. The holy Scriptures are in our hands, the Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation; and by them we may be sufficiently informed of the extent and importance of this great duty; a duty, enjoined, explained, and enforced, by Moses and the prophets, by the evangelists and apostles, by the precepts of Solomon and the example of Christ.

From those, to whom large possessions have been transmitted by their ancestors, or whose industry has been blessed with success, God always requires the tribute of charity: he commands that what he has given be enjoyed in imitating his bounty, in dispensing happiness, and cheering poverty, in

easing the pains of disease, and lightening the burden of oppression : he commands that the superfluity of bread be dealt to the hungry, and the raiment, which the possessor cannot use, be bestowed upon the naked ; and that no man turn away from his own flesh.

This is a tribute, which it is difficult to imagine that any man can be unwilling to pay, as an acknowledgment of his dependence upon the universal Benefactor, and an humble testimony of his confidence in that protection, without which, the strongest foundations of human power must fail at the first shock of adversity, and the highest fabrics of earthly greatness sink into ruin ; without which, wealth is only a floating vapour, and policy an empty sound.

But such is the prevalence of temptations, not early resisted ; such the depravity of minds, by which unlawful desires have been long indulged, and false appearances of happiness pursued with ardour and pertinaciousness ; so much are we influenced by example, and so diligently do we labour to deceive ourselves ; that it is not uncommon to find the sentiments of benevolence almost extinguished, and all regard to the welfare of others overborne by a perpetual attention to immediate advantage, and contracted views of present interest.

When any man has sunk into a state of insensibility like this, when he has learned to act only by the impulse of apparent profit, when he can look upon distress without partaking it, and hear the cries of poverty and sickness without a wish to relieve them ; when he has so far disordered his ideas as to value wealth without regard to its end, and

to amass with eagerness what is of no use in his hands; he is indeed not easily to be reclaimed: his reason, as well as his passions, is in combination against his soul, and there is little hope, that either persuasion will soften, or arguments convince him. A man, once hardened in cruelty by inveterate avarice, is scarcely to be considered as any longer human; nor is it to be hoped, that any impression can be made upon him by methods applicable only to reasonable beings. Beneficence and compassion can be awakened in such hearts only by the operation of divine grace, and must be the effect of a miracle, like that which turned the dry rock into a springing well.

Let every one, that considers this state of obdurate wickedness, that is struck with horror at the mention of a man void of pity, that feels resentment at the name of oppression, and melts with sorrow at the voice of misery, remember that those who have now lost all these sentiments, were originally formed with passions, and instincts, and reason, like his own: let him reflect, that he, who now stands most firmly, may fall by negligence, and that negligence arises from security. Let him, therefore, observe, by what gradations men sink into perdition, by what insensible deviations they wander from the ways of virtue, till they are at length scarce able to return; and let him be warned, by their example, to avoid the original causes of depravity, and repel the first attacks of unreasonable self-love; let him meditate on the excellence of charity, and improve those seeds of benevolence, which are implanted in every mind, but which will not produce fruit without care and cultivation.

Such meditations are always necessary for the promotion of virtue ; for a careless and inattentive mind easily forgets its importance, and it will be practised only with a degree of ardour, proportioned to the sense of our obligations to it.

To assist such reflections, to confirm the benevolence of the liberal, and to show those who have lived without regard to the necessities of others the absurdity of their conduct, I shall inquire,

First, Into the nature of charity ; and

Secondly, Into the advantages arising from the exercise of it.

First, I shall inquire into the nature of charity.

By charity is to be understood every assistance of weakness, or supply of wants, produced by a desire of benefiting others, and of pleasing God. Not every act of liberality, every increase of the wealth of another, not every flow of negligent profusion, or thoughtless start of sudden munificence, is to be dignified with this venerable name. There are many motives to the appearance of bounty, very different from those of true charity, and which, with whatever success they may be imposed upon mankind, will be distinguished at the last day by Him to whom all hearts are open. It is not impossible that men, whose chief desire is esteem and applause, who court the favour of the multitude, and think fame the great end of action, may squander their wealth in such a manner, that some part of it may benefit the virtuous or the miserable ; but as the guilt, so the virtue, of every action arises from design ; and those blessings which are be-

stowed by chance, will be of very little advantage to him that scattered them with no other prospect than that of hearing his own praises; praises, of which he will not be often disappointed, but of which our Lord has determined, that they shall be his reward. If any man, in the distribution of his favours, finds the desire of engaging gratitude, or gaining affection, to predominate in his mind; if he finds his benevolence weakened, by observing that his favours are forgotten, and that those whom he has most studiously benefited, are often least zealous for his service, he ought to remember, that he is not acting upon the proper motives of charity; for true charity arises from faith in the promises of God, and expects rewards only in a future state. To hope for our recompense in this life, is not beneficence, but usury.

And surely charity may easily subsist without temporal motives, when it is considered, that it is by the exercise of charity alone that we are enabled to receive any solid advantage from present prosperity, and to appropriate to ourselves any possession beyond the possibility of losing it. Of the uncertainty of success, and the instability of greatness, we have examples every day before us. Scarcely can any man turn his eyes upon the world, without observing the sudden rotations of affairs, the ruin of the affluent, and the downfall of the high; and it may reasonably be hoped, that no man, to whom opportunities of such observations occur, can forbear applying them to his own condition, and reflecting, that what he now contemplates in another, he may, in a few days, experience himself.

By these reflections he must be naturally led to inquire, how he may fix such fugitive advantages ; how he shall hinder his wealth from flying away, and leaving him nothing but melancholy, disappointment, and remorse : this he can effect only by the practice of charity, by dealing his bread to the hungry, and bringing the poor that is cast out to his house. By these means only, he can lay up for himself treasures in heaven, “ where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.” By a liberal distribution of his riches, he can place them above the reach of the spoiler, and exempt them from accident and danger ; can purchase to himself that satisfaction which no power on earth can take away ; and make them the means of happiness, when they are no longer in his hands. He may procure, by this means, of his wealth, what he will find to be obtained by no other, a method of applying an alleviation of the sorrows of age, of the pains of sickness, and of the agonies of death.

To enforce the duty of charity, 'it is so far from being necessary to produce any arguments drawn from a narrow view of our condition, a view restrained to this world, that the chief reason for which it is to be practised, is the shortness and uncertainty of life. To a man who considers for what purpose he was created, and why he was placed in his present state, how short a time, at most, is allotted to his earthly duration, and how much of that time may be cut off ; how can any thing give real satisfaction that terminates in this life ? How can he imagine that any acquisition can deserve his labour, which has no tendency to

the perfection of his mind? or how can any enjoyment engage his desires, but that of a pure conscience, and reasonable expectations of a more happy and permanent existence? Whatever superiority may distinguish us, and whatever plenty may surround us, we know that they can be possessed but a short time, and that the manner in which we employ them, must determine our eternal state; and what need can there be of any other argument for the use of them, agreeable to the command of him that bestowed them? What stronger incitement can any man require to a due consideration of the poor and needy, than that the Lord will deliver him in the day of trouble; in that day when the shadow of death shall compass him about, and all the vanities of the world shall fade away; when all the comforts of this life shall forsake him; when pleasure shall no longer delight, nor power protect him? In that dreadful hour shall the man, whose care has been extended to the general happiness of mankind, whose charity has rescued sickness from the grave, and poverty from the dungeon; who has heard the groans of the aged, struggling with misfortunes, and the cries of infants languishing with hunger, find favour in the sight of the great Author of society, and his recompense shall flow upon him from the fountain of mercy; he shall stand without fear on the brink of life, and pass into eternity with an humble confidence of finding that mercy which he has never denied. His righteousness shall go before him, and the glory of the Lord shall be his re-reward.

These blessings, and these rewards, are to be gained by the due use of riches; but they are not

confined to the rich, or unattainable by those whom Providence has placed in lower stations. Charity is an universal duty, which it is in every man's power, sometimes, to practise ; since every degree of assistance given to another, upon proper motives, is an act of charity ; and there is scarcely any man in such a state of imbecility, as that he may not, on some occasions, benefit his neighbour. He that cannot relieve the poor, may instruct the ignorant ; and he that cannot attend the sick, may reclaim the vicious. He that can give little assistance himself, may yet perform the duty of charity, by inflaming the ardour of others, and recommending the petitions, which he cannot grant, to those who have more to bestow. The widow that shall give her mite to the treasury, the poor man who shall bring to the thirsty a cup of cold water, shall not lose their reward.

And that this reward is not without reason decreed to the beneficent, and that the duty of charity is not exalted above its natural dignity and importance, will appear, by considering,

Secondly, The benefits arising from the exercise of charity.

The chief advantage which is received by mankind, from the practice of charity, is the promotion of virtue amongst those who are most exposed to such temptations as it is not easy to surmount ; temptations of which no man can say that he should be able to resist them, and of which it is not easy for any one that has not known them, to estimate the force, and represent the danger.

We see every day men blessed with abundance,

and revelling in delight, yet overborne by ungovernable desires of increasing their acquisitions; and breaking through the boundaries of religion, to pile heaps on heaps, and add one superfluity to another, to obtain only nominal advantages and imaginary pleasures.

For these we see friendships broken, justice violated, and nature forgotten; we see crimes committed, without the prospect of obtaining any positive pleasure, or removing any real pain: we see men toiling through meanness and guilt, to obtain that which they can enjoy only in idea, and which will supply them with nothing real which they do not already abundantly possess.

If men, formed by education and enlightened by experience, men whose observations of the world cannot but have shown them the necessity of virtue, and who are able to discover the enormity of wickedness, by tracing its original, and pursuing its consequences, can fall before such temptations, and, in opposition to knowledge and conviction, prefer to the happiness of pleasing God the flatteries of dependents, or the smiles of power; what may not be expected from him who is pushed forward into sin by the impulse of poverty, who lives in continual want of what he sees wasted by thousands in negligent extravagance, and whose pain is every moment aggravated by the contempt of those whom nature has subjected to the same necessities with himself, and who are only his superior by that wealth which they know not how to possess with moderation or decency?

How strongly may such a man be tempted to declare war upon the prosperous and the great!

With what obstinacy and fury may he rush on from one outrage to another, impelled on one part by the pressure of necessity, and attracted on the other by the prospect of happiness ; of happiness, which he sees sufficient to elevate those that possess it above the consideration of their own nature, and to turn them away from their own flesh ; that happiness, which appears greater by being compared with his own misery, and which he admires the more because he cannot approach it. He that finds in himself every natural power of enjoyment, will envy the tables of the luxurious, and the splendor of the proud : he who feels the cold of nakedness, and the faintness of hunger, cannot but be provoked to snatch that bread which is devoured by excess, and that raiment which is only worn as the decoration of vanity. Resentment may easily combine with want, and incite him to return neglect with violence.

Such are the temptations of poverty ; and who is there that can say, that he has not, sometimes, forsaken virtue upon weaker motives ? Let any man reflect upon the snares to which poverty exposes virtue, and remember how certainly one crime makes way for another, till at last all distinction of good and evil is obliterated ; and he will easily discover the necessity of charity to preserve a great part of mankind from the most atrocious wickedness.

The great rule of action, by which we are directed to do to others whatever we would that others should do to us, may be extended to God himself : whatever we ask of God, we ought to be ready to bestow on our neighbour : if we pray to

be forgiven, we must forgive those that trespass against us; and is it not equally reasonable, when we implore from Providence our daily bread, that we deal our bread to the hungry? and that we rescue others from being betrayed by want into sin, when we pray that we may not ourselves be led into temptation?

Poverty, for the greatest part, produces ignorance; and ignorance facilitates the attack of temptation: for how should any man resist the solicitations of appetite, or the influence of passion, without any sense of their guilt, or dread of the punishment? How should he avoid the paths of vice, who never was directed to the way of virtue?

For this reason, no method of charity is more efficacious than that which at once enlightens ignorance and relieves poverty; that implants virtue in the mind, and wards off the blasts of indigence that might destroy it in the bloom. Such is the charity of which an opportunity is now offered; charity, by which those who would, probably, without assistance, be the burdens or terrors of the community, by growing up in idleness and vice, are enabled to support themselves by useful employments, and glorify God by reasonable service.

Such are the general motives which the religion of Jesus affords to the general exercise of charity, and such are the particular motives for our laying hold of the opportunity which Providence has this day put into our power for the practice of it; motives, no less than the hope of everlasting happiness, and the fear of punishment which shall never end. Such incitements are surely sufficient to quicken the slowest, and animate the coldest; and

if there can be imagined any place in which they must be more eminently prevalent, it must be the place * where we now reside. The numerous frequenters of this place constitute a mixed assemblage of the happy and the miserable. Part of this audience has resorted hither to alleviate the miseries of sickness, and part to divert the satiety of pleasure ; part because they are disabled, by diseases, to prosecute the employment of their station, and part because their station has allotted them, in their own opinion, no other business than to pursue their pleasures : part have exhausted the medicines, and part have worn out the delights of every other place ; and these contrary conditions are so mingled together, that in few placés are the miseries of life so severely felt, or its pleasures more luxuriously enjoyed.

To each of these states of life may the precepts of charity be enforced with eminent propriety, and unanswerable arguments. Those whose only complaint is a surfeit of felicity, and whose fearless and confident gaiety brings them hither, rather to waste health than to repair it, cannot, surely, be so intent upon the constant succession of amusements which vanity and affluence have provided, as not, sometimes, to turn their thoughts upon those whom poverty and ignorance have cut off from enjoyment, and consigned a prey to wickedness, to misery, and to want. If their amusements afford them the satisfaction which the eager repetition of them seems to declare, they must certainly pity those who live in sight of so much

happiness, which they can only view from a distance, but can never reach ; and those whom they pity, they cannot, surely, hear the promises made to charity, without endeavouring to relieve. But if, as the wisest among the votaries of pleasure have confessed, they feel themselves unsatisfied and deluded ; if, as they own, their ardour is kept up by dissimulation, and they lay aside their appearance of felicity, when they retire from the eyes of those among whom they desire to propagate the deceit ; if they feel that they have wasted life without possessing it ; and know that they shall rise to-morrow to chase an empty good which they have often grasped at, but could never hold ; they may surely spare something for the purchase of solid satisfaction, and cut off part of that expense by which nothing is procured, for the sake of giving to others those necessities which the common wants of our being demand, and by the distribution of which, they may lay up some treasures of happiness against that day which is stealing upon them, the day of age, of sickness, and of death, in which they shall be able to reflect with pleasure on no other part of their time passed here, but that which was spent in the duties of charity : but, if these shall harden their dispositions, if these shall withhold their hands, let them not amuse themselves with the general excuses, or dream that any plea of inability will be accepted from those who squander wealth upon trifles, and trust sums, that might relieve the wants of multitudes, to the skill of play, and the uncertainties of chance.

To those to whom languishment and sickness have shown the instability of all human happiness ,

I hope it will not be requisite to enforce the necessity of securing to themselves a state of unshaken security, and unchangeable enjoyment. To inculcate the shortness of life to those who feel hourly decays, or to expatiate on the miseries of disease and poverty to them whom pain, perhaps, at this instant, is dragging to the grave, would be a needless waste of that time which their condition admonishes them to spend, not in hearing, but in practising their duty: and of sickness, charity seems the peculiar employment, because it is an act of piety which can be practised with such slight and transient attention as pain and faintness may allow. To the sick, therefore, I may be allowed to pronounce the last summons to this mighty work, which, perhaps, the divine Providence will allow them to hear. Remember thou! that now faintest under the weight of long-continued maladies, that to thee, more emphatically, “the night cometh, in which no man can work;” and, therefore, say not to him that asketh thee, “Go away now, and to-morrow I will give.” To-morrow? to-morrow is to *all* uncertain, to *thee* almost hopeless; to-day, if thou wilt hear the voice of God calling thee to repentance, and by repentance to charity, harden not thy heart: but what thou knowest that in thy last moment thou shalt wish done, make haste to do, lest thy last moment be now upon thee.

And let us all, at all times, and in all places, remember, that they who have given food to the hungry, raiment to the naked, and instruction to the ignorant, shall be numbered by the Son of God amongst the blessed of the Father.

SERMON V.

NEHEMIAH, CHAP. IX. VERSE 33.

Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us, for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.

THERE is nothing upon which more writers, in all ages, have laid out their abilities, than the miseries of life; and it affords no pleasing reflection to discover that a subject so little agreeable is not yet exhausted.

Some have endeavoured to engage us in the contemplation of the evils of life for a very wise and good end. They have proposed, by laying before us the uncertainty of prosperity, the vanity of pleasure, and the inquietudes of power, the difficult attainment of most earthly blessings, and the short duration of them all, to divert our thoughts from the glittering follies and tempting delusions that surround us, to an inquiry after more certain and permanent felicity; felicity not subject to be interrupted by sudden vicissitudes, or impaired by the malice of the revengeful, the caprice of the inconstant, or the envy of the ambitious. They have endeavoured to demonstrate, and have, in reality, demonstrated to all those who will steal a few moments from noise and show and luxury, to attend to reason and to truth, that nothing is worthy of our ardent wishes, or intense solicitude, that terminates

in this state of existence, and that those only make the true use of life that employ it in obtaining the favour of God, and securing everlasting happiness.

Others have taken occasion, from the dangers that surround and the troubles that perplex us, to dispute the wisdom or justice of the Governor of the world, or to murmur at the laws of divine Providence; as the present state of the world, the disorder and confusion of every thing about us, the casual and certain evils to which they are exposed, and the disquiet and disgust which either accompany or follow those few pleasures that are within our reach, seem, in their opinion, to carry no marks of infinite benignity. This has been the reasoning by which the wicked and profligate, in all ages, have attempted to harden their hearts against the reproaches of conscience, and delude others into a participation of their crimes. By this argument weak minds have been betrayed into doubts and distrust, and decoyed by degrees into a dangerous state of suspense, though, perhaps, never betrayed to absolute infidelity. For few men have been made infidels by argument and reflection; their actions are not generally the result of their reasonings, but their reasonings of their actions. Yet these reasonings, though they are not strong enough to pervert a good mind, may yet, when they coincide with interest, and are assisted by prejudice, contribute to confirm a man, already corrupted, in his impieties, and at least retard his reformation, if not entirely obstruct it.

Besides, notions thus derogatory from the providence of God tend, even in the best men, if not

timely eradicated, to weaken those impressions of reverence and gratitude, which are necessary to add warmth to his devotions, and vigour to his virtue; for, as the force of corporeal motion is weakened by every obstruction, though it may not be entirely overcome by it, so the operations of the mind are, by every false notion, impeded and embarrassed, and though they are not wholly diverted or suppressed, proceed at least with less regularity, and with less celerity.

But these doubts may easily be removed, and these arguments confuted, by a calm and impartial attention to religion and to reason: it will appear, upon examination, that though the world be full of misery and disorder, yet God is not to be charged with disregard to his creation; that if we suffer, we suffer by our own fault, and that "he has done right, but we have done wickedly."

We are informed by the Scriptures, that God is not the author of our present state; that when he created man, he created him for happiness; happiness, indeed, dependent upon his own choice, and to be preserved by his own conduct; for such must necessarily be the happiness of every reasonable being; that this happiness was forfeited by a breach of the conditions to which it was annexed; and that the posterity of him that broke the covenant were involved in the consequences of his fault. Thus religion shows us, that physical and moral evil entered the world together; and reason and experience assure us that they continue for the most part so closely united, that, to avoid misery, we must avoid sin, and that, while it is in our

power to be virtuous, it is in our power to be happy, at least to be happy to such a degree as may leave little room for murmur and complaints.

Complaints are, doubtless, irrational in themselves, and unjust with respect to God, if the remedies of the evils we lament are in our hands; for what more can be expected from the beneficence of our Creator, than that he should place good and evil before us, and then direct us in our choice?

That God has not been sparing of his bounties to mankind, or left them, even since the original transgression of his command, in a state so calamitous as discontent and melancholy have represented it, will evidently appear, if we reflect,

First, How few of the evils of life can justly be ascribed to God.

Secondly, How far a general piety might exempt any community from those evils.

Thirdly, How much, in the present corrupt state of the world, particular men may, by the practice of the duties of religion, promote their own happiness.

First, How few of the evils of life can justly be ascribed to God.

In examining what part of our present misery is to be imputed to God, we must carefully distinguish that which is actually appointed by him, from that which is only permitted, or that which is the consequence of something done to ourselves, and could not be prevented, but by the interruption of those general and settled laws, which we term the

course of nature, or the established order of the universe. Thus it is decreed by God, that all men should die ; and, therefore, the death of each man may justly be ascribed to God, but the circumstances and time of his death are very much in his own power, or in the power of others. When a good man falls by the hand of an assassin, or is condemned by the testimony of false witnesses, or the sentence of a corrupt judge, his death may, in some measure, be called the work of God, but his murder is the action of men. That he was mortal, is the effect of the divine decree ; but that he was deprived of life unjustly, is the crime of his enemies.

If we examine all the afflictions of mind, body, and estate, by this rule, we shall find God not otherwise accessory to them than as he works no miracles to prevent them, as he suffers men to be masters of themselves, and restrains them only by coercions applied to their reason. If God should, by a particular exertion of his omnipotence, hinder murder or oppression, no man could then be a murderer or an oppressor, because he would be withheld from it by an irresistible power ; but then that power, which prevented crimes, would destroy virtue ; for virtue is the consequence of choice. Men would be no longer rational, or would be rational to no purpose, because their actions would not be the result of free will, determined by moral motives ; but the settled and predestined motions of a machine impelled by necessity.

Thus it appears, that God would not act as the Governor of rational and moral agents, if he should lay any other restraints upon them than the hope

of rewards, or fear of punishments; and that to destroy or obviate the consequences of human actions, would be to destroy the present constitution of the world.

When, therefore, any man suffers pain from an injury offered him, that pain is not the act of God, but the effect of a crime, to which his enemy was determined by his own choice. He was created susceptible of pain, but not necessarily subjected to that particular injury which he now feels, and he is therefore not to charge God with his afflictions. The materials for building are naturally combustible; but when a city is fired by incendiaries, God is not the author of their destruction.

God may, indeed, by special acts of providence, sometimes hinder the designs of bad men from being successfully executed, or the execution of them from producing such consequences as it naturally tends to; but this, whenever it is done, is a real, though not always a visible miracle, and is not to be expected in the ordinary occurrences of life, or the common transactions of the world.

In making an estimate, therefore, of the miseries that arise from the disorders of the body, we must consider how many diseases proceed from our own laziness, intemperance, or negligence; how many the vices or follies of our ancestors have transmitted to us; and beware of imputing to God the consequences of luxury, riot, and debauchery.

There are, indeed, distempers, which no caution can secure us from, and which appear to be more immediately the strokes of heaven; but these are not of the most painful or lingering kind; they are for the most part acute and violent, and quickly

terminate, either in recovery or death; and it is always to be remembered, that nothing but wickedness makes death an evil.

Nor are the inquietudes of the mind less frequently excited by ourselves. Pride is the general source of our infelicity. A man that has an high opinion of his own merits, of the extent of his capacity, of the depth of his penetration, and the force of his eloquence, naturally forms schemes of employment and promotion, adequate to those abilities he conceives himself possessed of; he exacts from others the same esteem which he pays to himself, and imagines his deserts disregarded, if they are not rewarded to the extent of his wishes. He claims more than he has a right to hope for, finds his exorbitant demands rejected, retires to obscurity and melancholy, and charges heaven with his disappointments.

Men are very seldom disappointed, except when their desires are immoderate, or when they suffer their passions to overpower their reason, and dwell upon delightful scenes of future honours, power, or riches, till they mistake probabilities for certainties, or wild wishes for rational expectations. If such men, when they awake from these voluntary dreams, find the pleasing phantom vanish away, what can they blame but their own folly?

With no greater reason can we impute to Providence the fears and anxieties that harass and distract us; for they arise from too close an adherence to those things from which we are commanded to disengage our affections. We fail of being happy, because we determine to obtain felicity by means different from those which God hath appointed. We

are forbidden to be too solicitous about future events ; and is the Author of that prohibition to be accused, because men make themselves miserable by disregarding it ?

Poverty, indeed, is not always the effect of wickedness ; it may often be the consequence of virtue ; but it is not certain that poverty is an evil. If we exempt the poor man from all the miseries to which his condition exposes him from the wickedness of others ; if we secure him from the cruelty of oppression, and the contumelies of pride ; if we suppose him to rate no enjoyment of this life beyond its real and intrinsic value, and to indulge no desire more than reason and religion allow, the inferiority of his station will very little diminish his happiness, and therefore the poverty of the virtuous reflects no reproach upon Providence. But poverty, like many other miseries of life, is often little more than an imaginary calamity. Men often call themselves poor, not because they want necessities, but because they have not more than they want. This, indeed, is not always the case, nor ought we ever to harden our hearts against the cries of those who implore our assistance, by supposing that they feel less than they express ; but let us all relieve the necessitous according to our abilities, and real poverty will soon be banished out of the world.

To these general heads may be reduced almost all the calamities that imbitter the life of man. To enumerate particular evils would be of little use. It is evident that most of our miseries are either imaginary, or the consequences either of our own

faults or the faults of others, and that it is therefore worthy of inquiry,

Secondly, How far a general piety might exempt any community from those evils.

It is an observation, very frequently made, that there is more tranquillity and satisfaction diffused through the inhabitants of uncultivated and savage countries, than is to be met with in nations filled with wealth and plenty, polished with civility, and governed by laws. It is found happy to be free from contention, though that exemption be obtained by having nothing to contend for; and an equality of condition, though that condition be far from eligible, conduces more to the peace of society than an established and legal subordination, in which every man is perpetually endeavouring to exalt himself to the rank above him, though by degrading others already in possession of it; and every man exerting his efforts to hinder his inferiors from rising to the level with himself. It appears that it is better to have no property, than to be in perpetual apprehensions of fraudulent artifices, or open invasions; and that the security arising from a regular administration of government, is not equal to that which is produced by the absence of ambition, envy, or discontent.

Thus pleasing is the prospect of savage countries, merely from the ignorance of vice, even without the knowledge of virtue; thus happy are they, amidst all the hardships and distresses that attend a state of nature, because they are, in a great measure, free from those which men bring upon one another.

But a community, in which virtue should generally prevail, of which every member should fear God with his whole heart, and love his neighbour as himself, where every man should labour to make himself "perfect, even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect," and endeavour, with his utmost diligence, to imitate the divine justice and benevolence, would have no reason to envy those nations whose quiet is the effect of their ignorance.

If we consider it with regard to public happiness, it would be opulent without luxury, and powerful without faction; its counsels would be steady, because they would be just; and its efforts vigorous, because they would be united. The governors would have nothing to fear from the turbulence of the people, nor the people any thing to apprehend from the ambition of their governors. The encroachments of foreign enemies they could not always avoid, but would certainly repulse, for scarce any civilized nation has been ever enslaved, till it was first corrupted.

With regard to private men, not only that happiness, which necessarily descends to particulars from the public prosperity, would be enjoyed; but even those blessings, which constitute the felicity of domestic life, and are less closely connected with the general good. Every man would be industrious to improve his property, because he would be in no danger of seeing his improvements torn from him. Every man would assist his neighbour, because he would be certain of receiving assistance, if he should himself be attacked by necessity. Every man would endeavour after merit, because merit would always be rewarded. Every tie of friendship

and relation would add to happiness, because it would not be subject to be broken by envy, rivalry, or suspicion. Children would honour their parents, because all parents would be virtuous; all parents would love their children, because all children would be obedient. The grief which we naturally feel at the death of those that are dear to us, could not, perhaps, be wholly prevented, but would be much more moderate than in the present state of things, because no man could ever want a friend, and his loss would, therefore, be less, because his grief, like his other passions, would be regulated by his duty. Even the relations of subjection would produce no uneasiness, because insolence would be separated from power, and discontent from inferiority. Difference of opinions would never disturb this community, because every man would dispute for truth alone, look upon the ignorance of others with compassion, and reclaim them from their errors with tenderness and modesty. Persecution would not be heard of among them, because there would be no pride on one side, nor obstinacy on the other. Disputes about property would seldom happen, because no man would grow rich by injuring another; and when they did happen, they would be quickly terminated, because each party would be equally desirous of a just sentence. All care and solicitude would be almost banished from this happy region, because no man would either have false friends or public enemies. The immoderate desire of riches would be extinguished where there was no vanity to be gratified. The fear of poverty would be dispelled, where there was no man suffered to want what was necessary to his support,

or proportioned to his deserts. Such would be the state of a community generally virtuous, and this happiness would probably be derived to future generations; since the earliest impressions would be in favour of virtue, since those, to whom the care of education should be committed, would make themselves venerable by the observation of their own precepts, and the minds of the young and unexperienced would not be tainted with false notions, nor their conduct influenced by bad examples.

Such is the state at which any community may arrive by the general practice of the duties of religion. And can Providence be accused of cruelty or negligence, when such happiness as this is within our power? Can man be said to have received his existence as a punishment, or a curse, when he may attain such a state as this; when even this is only preparatory to greater happiness, and the same course of life will secure him from misery, both in this world and in a future state?

Let no man charge this prospect of things with being a train of airy phantoms; a visionary scene, with which a gay imagination may be amused in solitude and ease, but which the first survey of the world will show him to be nothing more than a pleasing delusion. Nothing has been mentioned which would not certainly be produced in any nation by a general piety. To effect all this, no miracle is required; men need only unite their endeavours, and exert those abilities which God has conferred upon them, in conformity to the laws of religion.

To general happiness, indeed, is required a general concurrence in virtue; but we are not to delay the amendment of our own lives, in expectation of this favourable juncture. An universal reformation must be begun somewhere, and every man ought to be ambitious of being the first. He that does not promote it, retards it; for every one must, by his conversation, do either good or hurt. Let every man, therefore, endeavour to make the world happy, by a strict performance of his duty to God and man, and the mighty work will soon be accomplished.

Governors have yet a harder task; they have not only their own actions, but those of others, to regulate, and are not only chargeable with their own faults, but with all those which they neglect to prevent or punish. As they are entrusted with the government for the sake of the people, they are under the strongest obligations to advance their happiness, which they can only do by the encouragement of virtue.

But since the care of governors may be frustrated, since public happiness, which must be the result of public virtue, seems to be at a great distance from us, let us consider,

Thirdly, How much, in the present corrupt state of the world, particular men may, by the practice of the duties of religion, promote their own happiness.

He is very ignorant of the nature of happiness, who imagines it to consist wholly in the outward circumstances of life, which, being in themselves

transient and variable, and generally dependent upon the will of others, can never be the true basis of a solid satisfaction. To be wealthy, to be honoured, to be loved, or to be feared, is not always to be happy. The man who considers himself as a being accountable to God, as a being sent into the world only to secure immortal happiness by his obedience to those laws which he has received from his Creator, will not be very solicitous about his present condition, which will soon give way to a state permanent and unchangeable, in which nothing will avail him but his innocence, or disturb him but his crimes. While this reflection is predominant in the mind, all the good and evil of life sinks into nothing. While he presses forward towards eternal felicity, honours and reproaches are equally contemptible. If he be injured, he will soon cease to feel the wrong; if he be calumniated, the day is coming in which all the nations of the earth, and all the host of heaven, shall be witnesses of his justification. If his friends forsake or betray him, he alleviates his concern, by considering, that the divine promises are never broken, and that the favour of God can only be forfeited by his own fault. In all his calamities he remembers, that it is in his own power to make them subservient to his own advantage, and that patience is one of those virtues which he is commanded to practise, and which God has determined to reward. That man can never be miserable to whom persecution is a blessing; nor can his tranquillity be interrupted, who places all his happiness in his prospect of eternity.

Thus it appears, that, by the practice of our duty, even our present state may be made pleasing and desirable; and that if we languish under calamities, they are brought upon us, not by the immediate hand of Providence, but by our own folly and disobedience; that happiness will be diffused as virtue prevails; and “that God has done right, but we have done wickedly.”

SERMON VI.

PROVERBS, CHAP. XII. VERSE 2.

*When pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with
the lowly is wisdom.*

THE writings of Solomon are filled with such observations upon the nature and life of man, as were the result of long experience assisted with every advantage of mind and fortune; an experience that had made him acquainted with the actions, passions, virtues, and vices, of all ranks, ages, and denominations of mankind; and enabled him, with the divine assistance, to leave to succeeding ages a collection of precepts, that, if diligently attended to, will conduct us safe in the paths of life.

Of the ancient sages of the heathen world, so often talked of, and so loudly applauded, there is recorded little more than single maxims, which they comprised in few words, and often inculcated; for these they were honoured by their contemporaries, and still continue revered and admired; nor would it either be justice or gratitude to depreciate their characters, since every discoverer or propagator of truth is undoubtedly a benefactor to the world. But surely, if single sentences could procure them the epithet of *wise*, Solomon may, for this collection of important counsels, justly

claim the title of "the wisest amongst the sons of men."

Among all the vices against which he has cautioned us, (and he has scarce left one untouched), there is none upon which he animadverts with more severity, or to which he more frequently recalls our attention, by reiterated reflections, than the vice of *pride*; for which there may be many reasons assigned: but more particularly, two seem to deserve our consideration; the first drawn from the extensiveness of the sin, the other from the circumstance of the preacher.

The first is the extensiveness of the sin.

Pride is a corruption that seems almost originally ingrafted in our nature; it exerts itself in our first years, and, without continual endeavours to suppress it, influences our last. Other vices tyrannize over particular ages, and triumph in particular countries. Rage is the failing of youth, and avarice of age; revenge is the predominant passion of one country, and inconstancy the characteristic of another: but pride is the native of every country, infects every climate, and corrupts every nation. It ranges equally through the gardens of the east and the deserts of the south, and reigns no less in the cavern of the savage than in the palace of the epicure. It mingles with all our other vices, and, without the most constant and anxious care, will mingle also with our virtues. It is no wonder, therefore, that Solomon so frequently directs us to avoid this fault, to which we are all so liable; since nothing is more agreeable to reason, than that pre-

cepts of the most general use should be most frequently inculcated.

The second reason may be drawn from the circumstances of the preacher.

Pride was probably a crime to which Solomon himself was most violently tempted; and, indeed, it might have been much more easily imagined that he would have fallen into this sin, than into some others of which he was guilty; since he was placed in every circumstance that could expose him to it. He was a king absolute and independent, and by consequence surrounded with sycophants ready to second the first motions of self-love, and blow the sparks of vanity; to echo all the applauses, and suppress all the murmurs of the people; to comply with every proposal, and flatter every failing. These are the tempters to which kings have been always exposed, and whose snares few kings have been able to overcome.

But Solomon had not only the pride of royalty to suppress, but the pride of prosperity, of knowledge, and of wealth; each of them able to subdue the virtue of most men, to intoxicate their minds, and hold their reason in captivity. Well might Solomon more diligently warn us against a sin which had assaulted *him* in so many different forms. Could any superiority to the rest of the world make pride excusable, it might have been pardoned in Solomon; but he has been so far from allowing it either in himself or others, that he has left a perpetual attestation in favour of humility, “that where pride cometh, there cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom.”

This assertion I shall endeavour to explain and confirm,

First, by considering the nature of pride in general, with its attendants and consequences.

Secondly, by examining some of the usual motives to pride; and showing how little can be pleaded in excuse of it.

Thirdly, by showing the amiableness and excellence of humility.

First, by considering, in general, the nature of pride, with its attendants and consequences.

Pride, simply considered, is an immoderate degree of self-esteem, or an overvalue set upon a man by himself, and, like most other vices, is founded originally on an intellectual falsehood. But this definition sets this vice in the fairest light, and separates it from all its consequences, by considering man without relation to society, and independent of all outward circumstances. Pride, thus defined, is only the seed of that complicated sin, against which we are cautioned in the text: it is the pride of a solitary being, and the subject of scholastic disquisitions, not of a practical discourse.

In speculation, pride may be considered as ending where it began, and exerting no influences beyond the bosom in which it dwells; but in real life, and the course of affairs, pride will always be attended with kindred passions, and produce effects equally injurious to others, and destructive to itself.

He that overvalues himself will undervalue others, and he that undervalues others will oppress them.

To this fancied superiority it is owing, that tyrants have squandered the lives of millions, and looked unconcerned on the miseries of war. It is, indeed, scarcely credible, (it would, without experience, be absolutely incredible) that a man should carry destruction and slaughter round the world, lay cities in ashes, and put nations to the sword, without one pang or one tear; that we should feel no reluctance at seizing the possessions of another, at robbing parents of their children, and shortening or imbittering innumerable lives. Yet this fatal, this dreadful effect, has pride been able to produce. Pride has been able to harden the heart against compassion, and stop the ears against the cries of misery.

In this manner does pride operate, when unhappily united with power and dominion; and has, in the lower ranks of mankind, similar, though not equal effects. It makes masters cruel and imperious, and magistrates insolent and partial; it produces contempt and injuries, and dissolves the bond of society.

Nor is this species of pride more hurtful to the world, than destructive to itself. The oppressor unites heaven and earth against him; if a private man, he at length becomes the object of universal hatred and reproach; and if a prince, the neighbouring monarchs combine to his ruin. So that, "when pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom."

He that sets too high a value upon his own merits, will of course think them ill rewarded with his present condition. He will endeavour to exalt his fortune and his rank above others, in proportion

as his deserts are superior to theirs: he will conceive his virtues obscured by his fortune, lament that his great abilities lie useless and unobserved for want of a sphere of action, in which he might exert them in their full extent. Once fired with these notions, he will attempt to increase his fortune, and enlarge his sphere; and how few there are that prosecute such attempts with innocence, a very transient observation will sufficiently inform us.

Every man has remarked the indirect methods made use of in the pursuit of wealth; a pursuit, for the most part, prompted by pride: for to what end is an ample fortune generally coveted? Not that the possessor may have it in his power to relieve distress or recompense virtue; but that he may distinguish himself from the herd of mankind by expensive vices, foreign luxuries, and a pompous equipage. To pride, therefore, must be ascribed most of the fraud, injustice, violence, and extortion, by which wealth is frequently acquired.

Another concomitant of pride is envy, or the desire of debasing others. A proud man is uneasy and dissatisfied, while any of those applauses are bestowed on another, which he is desirous of himself. On this account, he never fails of exerting all his art to destroy or obstruct, a rising character: his inferiors he endeavours to depress, lest they should become his equals; and his equals, not only because they are so, but lest they should in time become his superiors. For this end he circulates the whisper of malevolence, aggravates the tale of calumny, and assists the clamour of defamation; opposes in public the justest designs,

and in private depreciates the most uncontested virtues.

Another consequence of immoderate self-esteem is an insatiable desire of propagating in others the favourable opinion he entertains of himself. No proud man is satisfied with being singly his own admirer; his excellences must receive the honour of the public suffrage: he therefore tortures his invention for means to make himself conspicuous, and to draw the eyes of the world upon him. It is impossible, and would be here improper, to enumerate all the fictitious qualities, all the petty emulations, and laborious trifles, to which this appetite, this eagerness of distinction, has given birth in men of narrow views and mean attainments: but who can, without horror, think on those wretches who attempt to raise a character by superiority of guilt? who endeavour to excel in vice, and outvie each other in debauchery? Yet thus far can pride infatuate the mind, and extinguish the light of reason.

But, for the most part, it is ordered by Providence, that the schemes of the ambitious are disappointed, the calumnies of the envious detected, and false pretences to reputation ridiculed and exposed; so that still “when pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom.”

I am now to consider, in the second place, some of the usual motives to pride, and show how little they can be pleaded in excuse of it.

A superior being, that should look down upon the disorder, confusion, and corruption of our world; that should observe the shortness of our

lives, the weakness of our bodies, the continual accidents or injuries to which we are subject, the violence of our passions, the irregularity of our conduct, and the transitory state of every thing about us; would hardly believe there could be among us such a vice as pride, or that any human being should need to be cautioned against being too much elated with his present state. Yet so it is, that, however weak or wicked we may be, we fix our eyes on some other that is represented by our self-love to be weaker, or more wicked, than ourselves, and grow proud upon the comparison. Thus, in the midst of danger and uncertainty, we see many intoxicated with the pride of prosperity; a prosperity that is hourly exposed to be disturbed; a prosperity that lies often at the mercy of a treacherous friend, or unfaithful servant; a prosperity which certainly cannot last long, but must soon be ended by the hand of death.

To consider this motive to pride more attentively, let us examine what it is to be prosperous. To be prosperous, in the common acceptation, is to have a large or an increasing fortune, great numbers of friends and dependents, and to be high in the esteem of the world in general. But do these things constitute the happiness of a man? of a being accountable to his Creator for his conduct, and, according to the account he shall give, designed to exist eternally in a future state of happiness or misery? What is the prosperity of such a state, but the approbation of that God, on whose sentence futurity depends? But neither wealth, friendships, or honours, are proofs of that approbation, or means necessary to procure it. They

often endanger, but seldom promote, the future happiness of those that possess them. And can pride be inspired by such prosperity as this?

Even with regard to the present life, pride is a very dangerous associate to greatness. A proud man is opposed in his rise, hated in his elevation, and insulted in his fall: he may have dependents, but can have no friends; and parasites, but no ingenuous companions.

Another common motive to pride is knowledge, a motive equally weak, vain, and idle, with the former. Learning, indeed, imperfect as it is, may contribute to many great and noble ends, and may be called in to the assistance of religion, as it is too often perversely employed against it; it is of use to display the greatness, and vindicate the justice, of the Almighty; to explain the difficulties, and enforce the proofs, of religion: and the small advances that may be made in science, are of themselves some proof of a future state; since they show that God, who can be supposed to make nothing in vain, has given us faculties evidently superior to the business of this present world: and this is, perhaps, one reason, why our intellectual powers are, in this life, of so great extent as they are. But how little reason have we to boast of our knowledge, when we only gaze and wonder at the surfaces of things! when the wisest and most arrogant philosopher knows not how a grain of corn is generated, or why a stone falls to the ground! But, were our knowledge far greater than it is, let us yet remember that goodness, not knowledge, is the happiness of man! The day will come, (it will come quickly,) when it shall profit us more to have sub-

duced one proud thought, than to have numbered the host of heaven.

There is another more dangerous species of pride, arising from a consciousness of virtue ; so watchful is the enemy of our souls, and so deceitful are our own hearts, that too often a victory over one sinful inclination exposes us to be conquered by another. Spiritual pride represents a man to himself beloved by his Creator in a particular degree, and, of consequence, inclines him to think others not so high in his favour as himself. This is an error, into which weak minds are sometimes apt to fall, not so much from the assurance that they have been steady in the practice of justice, righteousness, and mercy, as that they have been punctually observant of some external acts of devotion. This kind of pride is generally accompanied with great uncharitableness and severe censures of others, and may obstruct the great duty of repentance. But it may be hoped that a sufficient remedy against this sin may be easily found, by reminding those who are infected with it, that the blood of Christ was poured out upon the cross to make their best endeavours acceptable to God ; and that they, whose sins require such an expiation, have little reason to boast of their virtue.

Having thus proved the unreasonableness, folly, and odious nature of pride, I am, in the last place, to show the amiableness and excellence of humility.

Upon this head I need not be long, since every argument against any vice is equally an argument in favour of the contrary virtue ; and whoever proves

the folly of being proud, shows, at the same time, “that with the lowly there is wisdom.” But to evince beyond opposition the excellence of this virtue, we may, in few words, observe, that the life of our Lord was one continued exercise of humility. The Son of God condescended to take our nature upon him, to become subject to pain, to bear, from his birth, the inconveniences of poverty, and to wander from city to city, amidst opposition, reproach, and calumny. He disdained not to converse with publicans and sinners, to minister to his own disciples, and to weep at the miseries of his own creatures; he submitted to insults and revilings; and, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, opened not his mouth. At length, having borne all the cruel treatment that malice could suggest, or power inflict, he suffered the most lingering and ignominious death.—God of his infinite mercy grant, that, by imitating his humility, we may be made partakers of his merits! To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, now and ever! Amen.

SERMON VII.

JEREMIAH, CHAP. VI. VERSE 16.

Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

THAT almost every age, from the beginning of the world, has been eminently marked out, and distinguished from the rest, by some peculiar character, by particular modes of thinking or methods of acting, then almost universally prevalent, is evident from the histories of all nations. At one time, the whole world has bowed, without repining, to despotic power and absolute dominion; at another, not only the licentious and oppressive tyranny of governors has been restrained, but just and lawful authority trampled upon and insulted; at one time, all regard for private interest has been absorbed and lost in the concern for the welfare of the public, to which virtue itself has been made a sacrifice; at another, every heart has been engrossed by low views, and every sentiment of the mind has been contracted into the narrow compass of self-love. Thus have vice and virtue, wisdom and folly, or perhaps only different follies and opposite vices, alternately prevailed: thus have mankind rushed from one error to another, and suffered equally by both extremes.

These changes of conduct or opinion may be considered as the revolutions of human nature, often necessary, but always dangerous : necessary, when some favourite vice has generally infected the world, or some error, long established, begins to tyrannize, to demand implicit faith, and refuse examination : but dangerous, lest the mind, incensed by oppression, heated by contest, and elated by victory, should be too far transported to attend to truth ; and, out of zeal to secure her conquest, set up one error to depress another.

That no change in religion has been made with that calmness, caution, and moderation, which religion itself requires, and which common prudence shows to be necessary in the transaction of any important affair, every nation of the earth can sufficiently attest. Rage has been called in to the assistance of zeal, and destruction joined with reformation. Resolved not to stop short, men have generally gone too far ; and, in lopping superfluities, have wounded essentials.

This conduct, when we consider the weakness of human nature, and the circumstances of most of those by whom such changes have been effected, is entitled at least to compassion, if not to excuse ; nor can it be doubted that our great Creator looks down with tenderness and compassion upon the irregular starts and tempestuous agitations of a mind, moved by a zeal for his honour, and a love of truth. Had all error and misconduct such a plea as this, they might indeed be lamented and prayed against as weaknesses, but could hardly be censured or condemned as crimes.

But more slow and silent transitions from one

extreme to another are very frequent. Men, not impelled by the vehemence of opposition, but seduced by inclinations less violent, too often deviate from the paths of truth, and persuade others to follow them. The pride of singularity influences the teacher, and a love of novelty corrupts the follower; till the delusion, extending itself by degrees, becomes at length general, and overspreads a people.

The prevailing spirit of the present age seems to be the spirit of scepticism and captiousness, of suspicion and distrust; a contempt of all authority, and a presumptuous confidence in private judgment; a dislike of all established forms, merely because they are established, and of old paths, because they are old.

Into this temper have men been insensibly led by a warm assertion of the right of judging for themselves; a right not to be called in question, since God himself gave us a claim to it, in making us reasonable beings; and the apostle doubtless admits it, when he directs us to give the reason of our faith to any that shall demand it.

But this privilege, ill understood, has been, and always may be, the occasion of very dangerous and pernicious mistakes; it may be exercised without knowledge or discretion, till error be entangled with error, till divisions be multiplied by endless subdivisions, till the bond of peace be entirely broken, and the church become a scene of confusion, a chaos of discordant forms of worship and inconsistent systems of faith.

There are some men, we now find, to whom separation and disagreement appear not such formi-

dable evils, as they are generally represented ; who can look with the utmost calmness and unconcern at a rising schism, and survey, without any perturbation, the speedy progress of an increasing heresy. Let every man, say they, enjoy his opinions, since *he* only is answerable for them.

There are men, who, for the most part, value themselves, and are sometimes valued by others, for their enlarged views and generous sentiments ; who pretend to look with uncommon penetration into the causes of human actions, and the secret motions of the mind : but perhaps this opinion is no proof that their pretensions are well grounded, or that they are better acquainted with human nature than those whom they affect to ridicule and insult.

If it be granted that it is the duty of every man to publish, profess, and defend any important truth, and the truths of religion be allowed important, it will follow, that diversity of sentiments must naturally produce controversies and altercations : and how few there are capable of managing debates without unbecoming heat or dishonest artifices ; how soon zeal is kindled into fury, and how soon a concern for reputation mingles with a concern for truth ; how readily the antagonists deviate into personal invectives, and, instead of confuting the arguments, defame the lives of those whose doctrine they disapprove ; and how often disputes terminate in uproar, riot, and persecution ; every one is convinced, and too many have experienced. That diversity of opinions, which is the original and source of such evils as these, cannot, therefore, be too diligently obviated ; nor can too many endea-

vours be used to check the growth of new doctrines, and reclaim those that propagate them, before sects are formed, or schisms established.

This is not to be done by denying or disputing the right of private judgment, but by exhorting all men to exercise it in a proper manner, according to each man's measure of knowledge, abilities, and opportunities ; and by endeavouring to remove all those difficulties which may obstruct the discovery of truth, and exposing the unreasonableness of such prejudices as may perplex or mislead the inquirer.

The prejudice, to which many of the disorders of the present age, in which infidelity, superstition, and enthusiasm, seem contending for empire over us, may be justly ascribed, is an over-fondness for novelty, a desire of striking out new paths to peace and happiness, and a neglect of following the precept in the text, of asking for the old paths, where is the good way, and walking therein : a precept I shall therefore endeavour to illustrate,

First, By laying before you the dangers of judging of religion, without long and diligent examination.

Secondly, By evincing the reasonableness of searching into antiquity, or of asking for the old paths. And

Thirdly, By showing the happiness which attends a well-grounded belief and steady practice of religion.

First, I propose to lay before you the dangers of judging of religion, without long and diligent examination.

There is no topic more the favourite of the present age, than the innocence of error accompanied with sincerity. This doctrine has been cultivated with the utmost diligence, enforced with all the arts of argument, and embellished with all the ornaments of eloquence ; but perhaps not bounded, with equal care, by proper limitations, nor preserved, by just explication, from being a snare to pride, and a stumbling-block to weakness.

That the Judge of all the earth will do right ; that he will require in proportion to what he has given, and punish men for the misapplication or neglect of talents, not for the want of them ; that he condemns no man for not seeing what he has hid from him, or for not attending to what he could never hear ; seems to be the necessary, the inevitable consequence of his own attributes.

That error therefore may be innocent, will not be denied, because it undoubtedly may be sincere ; but this concession will give very little countenance to the security and supineness, the coldness and indifference of the present generation, if we consider deliberately, how much is required to constitute that sincerity, which shall avert the wrath of God, and reconcile him to error.

Sincerity is not barely a full persuasion of the truth of our assertions ; a persuasion, too often grounded upon a high opinion of our own sagacity, and confirmed perhaps by frequent triumphs over weak opponents, continually gaining new strength by a neglect of re-examination, which perhaps we decline, by industriously diverting our attention from any objections that arise in our thoughts, and suppressing any suspicion of a fallacy, before the

mind has time to connect its ideas, to form arguments, and draw conclusions. Sincerity is not a heat of the heart, kept up by eager contentions or warm professions, nor a tranquillity produced by confidence, and continued by indolence. There may be zeal without sincerity, and security without innocence. If we forbear to inquire through laziness or pride, or inquire with partiality, passion, or precipitancy; if we do not watch over the most hidden motions of our hearts, and endeavour, with our utmost efforts, to banish all those secret tendencies, and all those lurking inclinations, which operate very frequently without being attended to even by ourselves; if we do not carry on our search, without regard to the reputation of our teachers, our followers, or ourselves, and labour after truth with equal industry and caution; let us not presume to put any trust in our sincerity.

Such is the present weakness and corruption of human nature, that sincerity, real sincerity, is rarely to be found; but, till it be found, it is the last degree of folly to represent error as innocent. By a God infinitely merciful, and propitiated by the death of our blessed Saviour, it may indeed be pardoned, but it cannot be justified.

But the greatest part of those that declaim with most vehemence in defence of their darling notions, seem to have very little claim even to pardon on account of their sincerity. It is difficult to conceive what time is allotted to religious questions and controversies by a man whose life is engrossed by the hurries of business, and whose thoughts are continually upon the stretch, to form plans for the improvement of his fortune or the gratification of his

ambition : nor is it very probable, that such subjects are more seriously considered by men abandoned to pleasure ; men who sit down to eat, and rise up to play ; whose life is a circle of successive amusements, and whose hours are distinguished only by vicissitudes of pleasure : and yet, the questions which these frequently decide, and decide without the least suspicion of their own qualifications, are often of a very intricate and complicated kind, which must be disentangled by a long and continued attention, and resolved with many restrictions and great caution. Not only knowledge, judgment, and experience, but uninterrupted leisure and retirement are necessary, that the chain of reasoning may be preserved unbroken, and the mind perform its operations, without any hinderance from foreign objects.

To this end, men have formerly retreated to solitudes and cloisters, and excluded all the cares and pleasures of the world ; and when they have spent a great part of their lives in study and meditation, at last, perhaps, deliver their opinions, as learned men will generally do, with diffidence and fear.

Happy would it be for the present age, if men were now thus distrustful of their own abilities. They would not then adopt opinions, merely because they wish them to be true ; then defend what they have once adopted, warm themselves into confidence, and then rest satisfied with the pleasing consciousness of their own sincerity. We should not then see men, not eminent for any superior gifts of nature or extraordinary attainments, endeavouring to form new sects, and to draw the

“ world after them.” They may, indeed, act with an honest intention, and so far with sincerity ; but certainly without that caution which their inexperience ought to suggest, and that reverence for their superiors, which reason, as well as the laws of society, requires. They seem, even when considered with the utmost candour, to have rather consulted their own imaginations, than to have asked “ for the old paths, where is the good way.” It is therefore proper, in this place, that I should endeavour,

Secondly, To evince the reasonableness of searching into antiquity, or of asking for the “ old paths.”

A contempt of the monuments and the wisdom of antiquity, may justly be reckoned one of the reigning follies of these days, to which pride and idleness have equally contributed. The study of antiquity is laborious ; and to despise what we cannot or will not understand, is a much more expeditious way to reputation. Part of the disesteem into which their writings are now fallen, may indeed be ascribed to that exorbitant degree of veneration in which they were once held by blindness and superstition : but there is a mean betwixt idolatry and insult, between weak credulity and total disbelief. The ancients are not infallible, nor are their decisions to be received without examination ; but they are, at least, the determinations of men equally desirous with ourselves of discovering truth, and who had, in some cases, better opportunities than we now have.

With regard to the order and government of the

primitive church, we may, doubtless, follow their authority with perfect security: they could not possibly be ignorant of laws executed, and customs practised by themselves; nor would they, even supposing them corrupt, serve any interests of their own, by handing down false accounts to posterity. We are, therefore, to inquire from them, the different orders established in the ministry from the apostolic ages; the different employments of each, and their several ranks, subordinations, and degrees of authority. From their writings we are to vindicate the establishment of our church; and, by the same writings, are those who differ from us in these particulars, to defend their conduct.

Nor is this the only, though, perhaps, the chief use of these writers; for, in matters of faith and points of doctrine, those, at least, who lived in the ages nearest to the times of the apostles, undoubtedly deserve to be consulted. The oral doctrines and occasional explications of the apostles, would not be immediately forgotten in the churches to which they had preached, and which had attended to them with the diligence and reverence which their mission and character demanded. Their solutions of difficulties, and determinations of doubtful questions, must have been treasured up in the memory of their audiences, and transmitted for some time from father to son. Every thing, at least, that was declared by the inspired teachers to be necessary to salvation, must have been carefully recorded; and, therefore, what we find no traces of in the Scripture or the early fathers, as most of the peculiar tenets of the Romish church, must certainly be concluded to be not necessary. Thus,

by consulting first the Holy Scriptures, and next the writers of the primitive church, we shall make ourselves acquainted with the will of God ; thus shall we discover the good way, and find that rest for our souls, which will amply recompense our studies and inquiries ; as I shall attempt to prove,

Thirdly, by showing the happiness which attends a well-grounded belief and steady practice of religion.

The serenity and satisfaction at which we arrive, by a firm and settled persuasion of the fundamental articles of our religion, is very justly represented by the expression of finding “ rest for the soul.” A mind, restless and undetermined, continually fluctuating betwixt various opinions, always in pursuit of some better scheme of duties and more eligible system of faith, eager to embrace every new doctrine, and adopt the notions of every pretender to extraordinary light ; can never be sufficiently calm and unruffled, to attend to those duties which procure that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Suspense and uncertainty distract the soul, disturb its motions, and retard its operations : while we doubt in what manner to worship God, there is great danger lest we should neglect to worship him at all. A man, conscious of having long neglected to worship God, can scarcely place any confidence in his mercy, or hope, in the most pressing exigencies, for his protection : and how miserable is that man, who, on the bed of sickness, or in the hour of death, is without trust in the goodness of his Creator ! This state, dreadful as it appears, may be

justly apprehended by those who spend their lives in roving from one new way to another, and are so far from asking for the old paths, where is the good way, that when they are shown it, they say, we will not walk therein.

There is a much closer connexion between practice and speculation than is generally imagined. A man disquieted with scruples concerning any important article of religion, will, for the most part, find himself indifferent and cold, even to those duties which he practised before with the most active diligence and ardent satisfaction. Let him then ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and he shall find rest for his soul. His mind, once set at ease from perplexity and perpetual agitation, will return with more vigour to the exercises of piety. An uniform perseverance in these holy practices will produce a steady confidence in the divine favour, and that confidence will complete his happiness. To which that we may all attain, God of his infinite mercy grant, for the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, now and ever! Amen.

SERMON VIII.

ROMANS XII. THE LATTER PART OF THE 16TH
VERSE.

Be not wise in your own conceits.

It has been observed by those who have employed themselves in considering the method of Providence, and the government of the world, that good and evil are distributed, through all states of life, if not in equal proportions, yet in such degrees as leave very little room for those murmurs and complaints which are frequently produced by superficial inquiries, negligent surveys, and impatient comparisons.

Every condition has, with regard to this life, its inconveniences, and every condition has, likewise, its advantages; though its position to the eye of the beholder, may be so varied, as that, at some times, the misery may be concealed, and, at other times, the happiness: but to judge only by the eye, is not the way to discover truth. We may pass by men, without being able to distinguish whether they are to be numbered among those whose felicities or whose sorrows preponderate; as we may walk over the ground, without knowing whether its entrails contain mines of gold, or beds of sand.

Nor is it less certain, that, with respect to the more important prospects of a future state, the same impartiality of distribution may be generally

remarked; every condition of humanity being exposed on one side, and guarded on the other; so that every man is burdened, though none are overwhelmed; every man is obliged to vigilance, but none are harassed beyond their strength. The great business, therefore, of every man, is to look diligently round him, that he may note the approaches of an enemy; and to bar the avenues of temptation, which the particular circumstances of his life are most likely to lay open; and to keep his heart in perpetual alarm against those sins which constantly besiege him. If he be rich, let him beware, lest when he is "full, he deny God," and say, "Who is the Lord?" If he be poor, let him cautiously avoid to "steal," and "take the name" of his "God in vain."

There are some conditions of humanity, which are made particularly dangerous by an uncommon degree of seeming security; conditions, in which we appear so completely fortified, that we have little to dread, and therefore give ourselves up too readily to negligence and supineness; and are destroyed without precaution, because we flattered ourselves that destruction could not approach us. The fatal slumber of treacherous tranquillity may be produced and prolonged by many causes, by causes as various as the situations of life. Our condition may be such, as may place us out of the reach of those general admonitions, by which the rest of mankind are reminded of their errors, and awakened to their duty; it may remove us to a great distance from the common incitements to common wickedness, and, therefore, may superinduce a forgetfulness of our natural frailties, and

suppress all suspicions of the encroachments of sin. And the sin to which we are particularly tempted, may be of that insidious and seductive kind, as that, without alarming us by the horrors of its appearance, and shocking us with the enormity of any single acts, may, by slow advances, possess the soul, and, in destroying us, differ only from the atrociousness of more apparent wickedness, as a lingering poison differs from the sword; more difficultly avoided, and more certainly fatal.

To temptations of this subtle insinuating kind, the life of men of learning seems above all others to be exposed. As they are themselves appointed the teachers of others, they very rarely have the dangers of their own state set before them; as they are, by their abstraction and retirement, secluded from the gaieties, the luxuries, and the pageantries of life, they are willingly persuaded to believe, that because they are at a great distance from the rocks on which conscience is most frequently wrecked, that therefore, they sail with safety, and may give themselves to the wind, without a compass. The crimes, from which they are in danger, are not those from which the mind has been taught to shrink away with horror, or against which the invectives of moral or theological writers have generally been directed; and therefore they are suffered to approach unregarded, to gain ground imperceptibly upon minds directed to different views, and to fix themselves at leisure in the heart, where, perhaps, they are scarcely discovered till they are past eradication.

To these causes, or to some of these, it must surely be imputed, that learning is found so frequently to

fail in the direction of life, and to operate so faintly and uncertainly in the regulation of *their* conduct, who are most celebrated for their application and proficiency. They have been betrayed, by some false security, to withhold their attention from their own lives; they have grown knowing without growing virtuous; and have failed of the wisdom which is the gift of the Father of lights, because they have thought it unnecessary to seek it with that anxiety and importunity, to which only it is granted; they have trusted to their own powers, and were "wise in their own conceits."

There is, perhaps, no class of men, to whom the precept given by the apostle to his converts, against too great confidence, in their understandings, may be more properly inculcated, than those who are dedicated to the profession of literature; and are, therefore, necessarily advanced to degrees of knowledge above them who are dispersed among manual occupations, and the vulgar parts of life; whose attention is confined within the narrow limits of their own employments, and who have not often leisure to think of more than the means of relieving their own wants, by supplying the demands of others.

With these, and such as these, placed sometimes, by whatever means, in much higher stations, a man of learning has such frequent opportunities of comparing himself; and is so strongly incited, by that comparison, to indulge the contemplation of his own superiority; that it is not to be considered as wonderful, that vanity creeps in upon him; that he does not willingly withdraw his imagination from objects that so much flatter his passions; that

he pursues the train of thought from one reflection to another ; places himself and others in every situation in which he can appear with advantage in his own eyes ; rises to comparisons with still higher characters, and still retains the habit of giving himself the preference ; and, in all disputable cases, turns the balance in his own favour, by superadding, from his own conceit, that wisdom, which by nature he does not possess, or by industry, he has not acquired.

This wisdom in his own conceit is very easily, at first, mistaken for qualities, not in themselves criminal, nor in themselves dangerous ; nor is it easy to fix the limits, in speculation, between a resolute adherence to that which appears truth, and an obstinate obtrusion of peculiar notions upon the understanding of others ; between the pleasure that naturally arises from the enlargement of the mind and increase of knowledge, and that which proceeds from a contempt of others, and the insolent triumphs of intellectual superiority. Yet, though the confines of these qualities are nearly alike, their extremes are widely different ; and it will soon be discovered, how much evil is avoided, by repressing that opinion of ourselves, which vanity suggests ; and that confidence, which is gained only "by measuring ourselves by ourselves," dwelling on our own excellence, and flattering ourselves with secret panegyrics.

As this false claim to wisdom is the source of many faults, as well as miseries, to men of learning, it seems of the utmost importance, to obviate it in the young, who may be imagined to be very little tainted, and suppress it in others, whose

greater advances and more extensive reputation have more endangered them ; nor can any man think himself so innocent of this fault, or so secure from it, as that it should be unnecessary for him to consider,

First, The dangers which men of learning incur, by being wise in their own conceits.

Secondly, The proper means, by which that pernicious conceit of wisdom may be avoided or suppressed.

In order to state with more accuracy the dangers which men dedicated to learning may be reasonably imagined to incur, by being wise in their own conceits, it is necessary to distinguish the different periods of their lives ; and to examine, whether this disposition is not, in its tendency, equally opposite to our duty, and, by inevitable consequence, in its effects, equally destructive of our happiness in every state.

The business of the life of a scholar is to accumulate, and to diffuse knowledge ; to learn, in order that he may teach. The first part of his time is assigned to study, and the acquisition of learning ; the latter, to the practice of those arts which he has acquired, and to the instruction of others, who have had less time, or opportunities, or abilities, for improvement. In the state, therefore, of a learner, or of a teacher, the man of letters is always to be considered ; and if it shall appear, that, on whatever part of his task he is employed, a false opinion of his own excellence will naturally and certainly defeat his endeavours ; it may be hoped, that there will be found sufficient

reason why no man should "be wise in his own conceit."

Since no man can teach what he has never learned, the value and usefulness of the latter part of life must depend, in a great measure, upon the proper application of the earlier years; and he that neglects the improvement of his own mind, will never be enabled to instruct others. Light must strike on the body by which light can be reflected. The disposition, therefore, which best befits a young man, about to engage in a life of study, is patience in inquiry, eagerness of knowledge, and willingness to be instructed; a due submission to greater abilities and longer experience; and a ready obedience to those from whom he is to expect the removal of his ignorance, and the resolution of his doubts.

How unlike any one, wise in his own conceit, is to excite, or promote in himself, such inclinations, may be easily determined. It is well known that study is not diligently prosecuted, but at the expense of many pleasures and amusements, which no young man will be persuaded to forbear, but upon the most cogent motives and the strongest conviction. He that is to draw truth from the depths of obscurity, must be fully informed of its value, and the necessity of finding it: he that engages in a state opposite to the pleasures of sense, and the gratification of every higher passion, must have some principle within, strongly implanted, which may enforce industry and repel temptation. But how shall he, who is already "wise in his own conceit," submit to such tedious and laborious methods of instruction? Why should he toil for that, which, in his own opinion, he possesses; and

drudge for the supply of wants which he does not feel? He has, already, such degrees of knowledge, as, magnified by his own imagination, exalt him above the rest of mankind; and to climb higher, would be to labour without advantage.

He, already, has a wide extent of science within his view, and his willingness to be pleased with himself, does not suffer him to think, or to dwell on the thought of any thing beyond; and who that sees all, would wish to see further? That submission to authority, and that reverence for instruction, which so well becomes every man at his first entrance upon new regions of learning, where all is novelty, confusion, and darkness, and no way is to be found through the intricacies of opposite systems, but by tracing the steps of those that have gone before; that willingness to receive implicitly what further advances only can enable him to prove, which initiation always supposes; are very little to be expected from him, who looks down with scorn upon his teacher, and is more ready to censure the obscurity of precepts, than to suspect the force of his own understanding. Knowledge is to be attained by slow and gradual acquisitions; by a careful review of our ideas, and a regular superstructure of one proposition on another; and is, therefore, the reward only of diligence and patience. But patience is the effect of modesty: pride grasps at the whole; and what it cannot hold, it affects to despise: it is rather solicitous to display, than increase its acquisitions; and rather endeavours, by fame, to supply the want of knowledge, than by knowledge to arrive at fame.

That these are not imaginary representations,

but true copies of real life, most of those to whom the instruction of young men is intrusted, will be ready to confess; since they have often the dissatisfaction of finding, that, in proportion as greater advances have been made in the first period of life, there is less diligence in the second; and that, as it was said of the ancient Gauls, that they were more than men in the onset, and less than women in the shock; it may be said, in our literary contentions, that many, who were men at school, are boys at the college: their ardour remits; their diligence relaxes; and they give themselves to a lazy contemplation of comparative excellence, without considering that the comparison is hourly growing less advantageous, and that the acquisitions which they boast are mouldering away.

Such is the danger to a learner, of too early an opinion of his own importance: but if we suppose him to have escaped in his first years this fatal confidence, and to be betrayed into it by a longer series of successful application, its effects will then be equally dangerous; and, as it hinders a young man from receiving instruction, it will obstruct an older student in conveying it.

There is no employment in which men are more easily betrayed to indecency and impatience, than in that of teaching; in which they necessarily converse with those who are their inferiors in the relation by which they are connected, and whom it may be sometimes proper to treat with that dignity which too often swells into arrogance; and to restrain with such authority, as not every man has learned to separate from tyranny. In this state of temporary honour, a proud man is too willing to exert

his prerogative, and too ready to forget that he is dictating to those, who may one day dictate to him : he is inclined to wonder that what he comprehends himself is not equally clear to others ; and often reproaches the intellects of his auditors, when he ought to blame the confusion of his own ideas, and the improprieties of his own language. He reiterates, therefore, his positions, without elucidation, and enforces his assertions by his frown, when he finds arguments less easy to be supplied. Thus forgetting that he had to do with men, whose passions are perhaps equally turbulent with his own, he transfers, by degrees, to his instruction, the prejudices which are first raised by his behaviour ; and having forced upon his pupils an hatred of their teacher, he sees it quickly terminate in a contempt of the precept.

But instruction extends further than to seminaries of students, or the narrow auditories of sequestered literature. The end of learning is, to teach the public, to superintend the conduct, watch over the morals, and regulate the opinions of parishes, dioceses, and provinces ; to check vices in their first eruption, and suppress heresies in the whispers of their rise : and, surely, this awful, this arduous task, requires qualities, which a man, “ wise in his own conceit,” cannot easily attain ; that mildness of address, that patience of attention, that calmness of disputation, that selection of times, and places, and circumstances, which the vehemence of pride will not regard : and, in reality, it will generally be found, that the first objection and the last to an unacceptable pastor, is, that he is proud, that he is too wise for familiarity, and

will not descend to the level with common understandings.

Such is the consequence of too high an esteem of our own powers and knowledge ; it makes us in youth negligent, and in age useless ; it teaches us too soon to be satisfied with our attainments, or it makes our attainments unpleasing, unpopular, and ineffectual ; it neither suffers us to learn nor to teach ; but withholds us from those by whom we might be instructed, and drives those from us whom we might instruct. It is, therefore, necessary to obviate these evils, by inquiring,

Secondly, By what means this pernicious conceit of wisdom may be avoided or suppressed.

It might be imagined, if daily experience did not show us how vainly judgments are formed of real life from speculative principles, that it might be easy for any man to extirpate a high conceit of human learning from his own heart or that of another ; since one great purpose of knowledge is to show us our own defects, follies, and miseries ; yet, whatever be the reason, we find none more subject to this fault, than those whose course of life ought more particularly to exempt them from it.

For the suppression of this vain conceit, so injurious to the professors of learning, many considerations might be added to those which have already been drawn from its effects. The reasons, indeed, why every man should be humble, are inseparably connected with human nature : for what can any man see, either within or without himself, that does not afford him some reason to remark his own ignorance, imbecility, and meanness? But

on these reflections it is less proper to insist, because they have been explained already by almost every writer upon moral and religious duties, and because, in reality, the pride which requires our chief caution, is not so much absolute, as comparative. No man so much values himself upon the general prerogatives of human nature, as upon his own peculiar superiority to other men; nor will he, therefore, be humbled, by being told of the ignorance, the weakness, and wickedness of humanity; for he is satisfied with being accounted one of the most knowing, among the ignorant; the most able, among the weak; and the most virtuous, among the wicked.

The pride of the learned, therefore, can only be repressed by showing, what, indeed, might easily be shown, that it is not justifiable, even upon comparison with the rest of men; for, without urging any thing in derogation from the dignity and importance of learning in general, which must always, either immediately, or, by the intervention of others, govern the world; it will be found, that they who are most disposed to be swelled to haughtiness by their own attainments, are generally so far from having any just claim to the superiority which they exert, that they are betrayed to vanity by ignorance; and are pleased with themselves, as a hind with his cottage, not because, upon inquiry, they are convinced of the reasonableness of the preference, but because they overvalue the little they possess, for want of knowing its littleness; and are contented with their own state, as a blind man feels no loss from the absence of beauty. Nor needs there any other proof of the origin of literary pride, than that it is chiefly to be found

amongst those who have secluded themselves from the world, in pursuit of petty inquiries and trivial studies.

To such men it should be recommended, that before they suffer themselves to fix the rule of their own accomplishments, and look down on others with contempt, they should enjoin themselves to spend some time in inquiring into their own pretensions; and consider who they are whom they despise, and for what reason they suffer themselves to indulge the arrogance of contempt. Such an examination will soon drive back the pedant to his college, with juster conceptions, and with humbler sentiments: for he will find that those whom he imagined so much below his own exaltation, often flourish in the esteem of the world, while he himself is unknown; and teaching those arts, by which society is supported, and on which the happiness of the world depends; while he is pleasing himself with idle amusements, and wasting his life upon questions, of which very few desire the solution.

But if this method of obtaining humility be ineffectual, he may, however, establish it upon more strong and lasting principles, by applying himself to the duties of religion, and the word of God; that sacred and inscrutable word, which will show him the inefficacy of all other knowledge, and those duties, which will imprint upon his mind, that he best understands the sacred writings who most carefully obeys them. Thus will humility fix a firm and lasting basis, by annihilation of all empty distinctions and petty competitions, by showing, that "one thing only is necessary," and that "God is all in all."

SERMON IX.

1 CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER XI. VERSE 28.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

NOTHING is more frequently injurious to religion, or more dangerous to mankind, than the practice of adding to the divine institutions, and of teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. The doctrines of the blessed sacrament, which, as they are expressed in the Holy Scriptures, do not seem to be very dark or difficult, yet have been so perverted and misrepresented, as to occasion many disputes among men of learning, and many divisions in the Christian world. In our own church, many religious minds have been filled with groundless apprehensions, and distracted with unnecessary inquietudes, by mistaken notions of the Lord's Supper. Many have forborne to partake of it, because they have not, in their own opinion, arrived at that degree of holiness required to it, which they erroneously conceive to be such, as indeed no mere man ever can attain; a holiness, which consists in little less than a complete exemption from sin, and an uniform and uninterrupted observance of every precept of religion. They find themselves unable to perform this duty without imperfections, and therefore they entirely neglect it; not considering, that the same reason is of equal force for the neglect of every duty; since none can be performed by

us, in this frail state, without lapses, negligences, and failings; and that God will accept unfeigned repentance, sincere intentions, and earnest endeavours, though entangled with many frailties. They do not consider that the participation of the sacrament is a duty enjoined all Christians, though all do not rise to equal degrees of virtue, and, by consequence, that many must be admitted to the holy table who have not reached the utmost heights of religious excellence. Heaven itself will be accessible to many who died in their struggles with sin, in their endeavours after virtue, and the beginning of a new life: and surely they are not to be excluded from commemorating the sufferings of our Saviour, in a Christian congregation, who would not be shut from heaven, from the assemblies of saints, and the choirs of angels.

There are some who neglect this duty, as they omit others, not from scruples of melancholy piety or mistaken severity, but from supineness and carelessness, or an opinion that this precept is less necessary to be observed, than some others delivered by the same authority.

Many other notions, not well grounded, or capable of proof, are entertained of this institution; which I shall endeavour, without giving a particular account of them, to obviate and suppress, by showing,

First, What is the nature and end of this institution according to the Scriptures.

Secondly, What are the obligations which enforce the duty of communion. And,

Thirdly, What things are required of them that come to the Lord's Supper.

First, I propose to lay before you the nature and end of this institution according to the Scriptures.

The account of the first institution of this sacrament is thus delivered by the evangelist (Luke, chap. xxii. v. 19.) "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." This narration is repeated in the epistle to the Corinthians, with this comment or explanation: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." From these passages compared, then, it appears, that this sacrament is a representation of the death of our Saviour, appointed by himself, to be celebrated by all his followers, in all ages; to the end that by commemorating his sufferings in a solemn and public manner, they might declare their confidence in his merits, their belief of his mission, and their adherence to his religion.

It has likewise a tendency to increase this confidence, confirm this belief, and establish this adherence, not only by the new strength which every idea acquires by a new impression, and which every persuasion attains by new recollection, approbation, and meditation; but likewise by the supernatural and extraordinary influences of grace, and those blessings which God has annexed to the due use of means appointed by himself.

By commemorating the death of Christ, as the Redeemer of the world, we confess our belief in him; for why else should we perform so solemn

a rite in commemoration of him? To confess our belief in him, is to declare ourselves his followers. We enter into an obligation to perform those conditions upon which he has admitted us to follow him, and to practise all the duties of that religion which he has taught us.

This is implied in the word sacrament, which, being originally used to signify an oath of fidelity taken by the soldiers to their leaders, is now made use of by the church, to import a solemn vow of unshaken adherence to the faith of Christ.

Thus the sacrament is a kind of repetition of baptism, the means whereby we are re-admitted into the communion of the church of Christ, when we have, by sin, been separated from it; for every sin, and much more any habit or course of sin, long continued, is, according to the different degrees of guilt, an apostasy or defection from our Saviour, as it is a breach of those conditions upon which we became his followers; and he that breaks the condition of a covenant, dissolves it on his side. Having, therefore, broken the covenant between us and our Redeemer, we lose the benefits of his death; nor can we have any hopes of obtaining them, while we remain in this state of separation from him.

But vain had been the suffering of our Saviour, had there not been left means of reconciliation to him; since every man falls away from him occasionally, by sins, of negligence at least, and, perhaps, by known, deliberate, premeditated offences: so that some method of renewing the covenant between God and man was necessary, and for this purpose this sacrament was instituted; which is, therefore, a renewal of our broken vows, a re-

entrance into the society of the church, and the act by which we are restored to the benefits of our Saviour's death, upon performance of the terms prescribed by him.

So that this sacrament is a solemn ratification of a covenant renewed; by which, after having alienated ourselves from Christ by sin, we are restored, upon our repentance and reformation, to pardon and favour, and the certain hopes of everlasting life.

When we thus enter upon a new life by a solemn, deliberate, and serious dedication of ourselves to a more exact and vigilant service of God, and oblige ourselves to the duties of piety by this sacrament, we may hope to obtain, by fervent and humble prayer, such assistances from God as may enable us to perform those engagements, which we have entered into by his command, and in the manner appointed by him; always remembering, that we must use our own endeavours, and exert our utmost natural powers; for God only co-operates with the diligent and the watchful. We must avoid sin, by avoiding those occasions which betray us to it; and as we pray that we may not be led, we must be cautious of leading ourselves, into temptation.

All sin that is committed by Christians, is committed either through an absolute forgetfulness of God, for the time in which the inordinate passion, of whatever kind it be, predominates and prevails; or because, if the ideas of God and religion were present to our minds, they were not strong enough to overcome and suppress the desires excited by some pleasing, or the apprehensions raised by some terrible object: so that, either the love or fear of

temporal good or evil were more powerful than the love or fear of God.

All ideas influence our conduct with more or less force, as they are more or less strongly impressed upon the mind; and they are impressed more strongly, as they are more frequently recollected or renewed. For every idea, whether of love, fear, grief, or any other passion, loses its force by time; and, unless revived by accident or voluntary meditation, will at last vanish. But by dwelling upon, and indulging any idea, we may increase its efficacy and force, make it, by degrees, predominant in the soul, and raise it to an ascendant over our passions, so that it shall easily overrule those affections or appetites which formerly tyrannized within us.

Thus, by a neglect of God's worship and sacraments, a man may lose almost all distinction whatsoever of good and evil, and, having no awe of the divine power, to oppose his inclinations to wickedness, may go forward from crime to crime without remorse: and he that struggles against vice, and is often overcome by powerful temptations, if, instead of giving way to idleness and despair, he continues his resistance, and, by a diligent attendance upon the service and sacraments of the church, together with a regular practice of private devotion, endeavours to strengthen his faith, and imprint upon himself an habitual attention to the laws of God, and a constant sense of his presence; he will soon find himself able to avoid the snares of sin; or, if he fall into them by inadvertency, to break them. He will find the fear of God grow superior to the desires of wealth or the love of pleasure; and, by persisting to frequent the church and sacraments, and thereby to preserve those no-

tions of piety from being effaced or weakened, he will be able to persevere in a steady practice of virtue, and enjoy the unspeakable pleasures of a quiet conscience.

Thus it appears, that the blessed sacrament is a commemoration of the death of our Lord ; consequently, a declaration of our faith ; and both, naturally, and by the cooperation of God, the means of increasing that faith. And it appears also, that it is a renewal of our baptismal vow, after we have broken it by sin ; and a renovation of that covenant, by which we are adopted the followers of Jesus, and made partakers of his merits, and the benefits of his death.

This account has almost anticipated what I professed to treat of

Secondly, The obligations which enforce the duty of communion.

For the obligations to any duty must bear proportion to the importance of it ; and the importance of a duty must be rated by the effect which it produces or promotes ; and, therefore, as the benefits which we receive from this sacrament have been already shown, the necessity of it is sufficiently apparent.

But we may further enforce this practice upon ourselves and others, by considering, first, that it is a positive injunction of our blessed Saviour, which, therefore, all those who believe in him are bound to obey ; that to dispute the usefulness, or call in question the necessity of it, is to reform his religion, and to set up our own wisdom in opposition to his commands ; and that, to refuse the means of

grace, is to place our confidence in our own strength, and to neglect the assistance of that Comforter, who came down from heaven, according to the most true promise of our blessed Saviour, to lead the apostles out of darkness and error, and to guide them and us into the clear light and certain knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ.

If we consider this sacrament as a renewal of the vow of baptism, and the means of reconciling us to God, and restoring us to a participation of the merits of our Saviour, which we had forfeited by sin, we shall need no persuasions to a frequent communion: for certainly nothing can be more dreadful than to live under the displeasure of God, in constant danger of appearing before him while he is yet unappeased, and of losing the benefits of our redemption. Whoever he be, whom sin has deluded and led away, let him not delay to return to his duty, lest some sudden disease seize upon him, and the hand of death cut him off for ever from any possibility of reformation, while he is indolent and voluptuous, irreligious and profane. It will be too late to bewail his supineness, and lament his folly, when the dreadful and irrevocable sentence is past, and the gates of hell are closed upon him. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye on him while he is near! Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

But lest, instead of obtaining pardon, we aggravate our sins, by coming unprepared to the holy table, let us consider,

Thirdly, What is required of them that come to the Lord's Supper.

With respect to the preparatory duties requisite to a worthy reception of the sacrament, Saint Paul has left this precept, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread." Which will be easily explained, by recurring to what has been already said of the nature of the sacrament.

By partaking of the communion, we declare, in the most solemn manner, in the presence of God and man, that we hold the faith of Jesus ; that we are his followers, who expect eternal salvation from his merits ; and, therefore, that we engage ourselves to that obedience to his commands, and that strictness and regularity of life, which he requires from those who place their confidence in his mediation : we profess, likewise, that we sincerely and humbly repent of those offences by which we have separated ourselves from him ; and that, in consequence of this profession, we unite ourselves again to the communion of the church.

Nothing can be more reasonable, before this solemn profession, than that a man examine himself, whether it be true ; whether he really and unfeignedly resolves to accept the conditions of salvation offered to him, and to perform his part of the covenant which he comes to ratify ; or, whether he is not about to mock God ; to profess a faith which he does not hold, and a purity which he does not intend to aim at.

The terms upon which we are to hope for any benefits from the merits of Christ, are faith, repentance, and subsequent obedience. These are, therefore, the three chief and general heads of

examination. We cannot receive the sacrament, unless we believe in Christ ; because, by receiving it, we declare our belief in him, and a lying tongue is an abomination to the Lord. We cannot receive it without repentance, because repentance is the means by which, after sin, we are reconciled to God ; and we cannot, without dreadful wickedness, by partaking of the outward tokens of reconciliation, declare that we believe God at peace with our souls, when we know that, by the omission of repentance, we are yet in a state of voluntary alienation from him. We cannot receive it without a sincere intention of obedience, because, by declaring ourselves his followers, we enter into obligations to obey his commandments. We are, therefore, not transiently and carelessly, but frequently and seriously, to ask ourselves, whether we firmly believe the promises of our Saviour—whether we repent of our sins—and resolve, for the future, to avoid all those things which God has forbidden, and practise all those which he has commanded. And when any man is convinced that he has formed real resolutions of a new life, let him pray for strength and constancy to persevere in them ; and let him come joyfully to the holy table, in sure confidence of pardon, reconciliation, and life everlasting.

Which that we may all obtain, God of his infinite mercy grant, for the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour ! to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be ascribed all honour, adoration, and praise, now and for ever ! Amen.

SERMON X.

GALATIANS, CHAPTER VI. VERSE 7.

Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap.

ONE of the mighty blessings bestowed upon us by the Christian revelation, is, that we have now a certain knowledge of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments that await us after death, and will be adjusted according to our conduct in this world. We, on whom the light of the Gospel shines, walk no longer in darkness, doubtful of the benefit of *good*, or the danger of *bad* actions : we know, that we live and act under the eye of our Father and our Judge, by whom nothing is overlooked or forgotten, and who, though, to try our obedience, he suffers, in the present state of things, the same events to happen to the good and to the evil, will at last certainly distinguish them, by allotting them different conditions beyond the grave ; when it will appear, in the sight of men and of angels, how amiable is godliness, and how odious is sin ; by the final sentence, which shall bring upon man the consequences of his own actions, so as, that “ whatsoever a man shall sow, that shall he reap.”

The ancient heathens, with whose notions we are acquainted, how far soever they might have carried their speculations of moral or civil wisdom,

had no conception of a future state, except idle fictions, which those who considered them treated as ridiculous, or dark conjectures, formed by men of deep thoughts and great inquiry, but neither, in themselves, capable of compelling conviction, nor brought at all to the knowledge of the gross of mankind, of those who lived in pleasure and idleness, or in solitude and labour; they were confined to the closet of the student, or the school of the lecturer, and were very little diffused among the busy or the vulgar.

There is no reason to wonder, that many enormities should prevail where there was nothing to oppose them. When we consider the various and perpetual temptations of appetite within, and interest without; when we see, that on every side there is something that solicits the desires, and which cannot be innocently obtained; what can we then expect, but that, notwithstanding all the securities of the law, and all the vigilance of magistrates, those that know of no other world will eagerly make the most of this, and please themselves, whenever they can, with very little regard to the right of others?

As the state of the heathens was a state of darkness, it must have been a state likewise of disorder; a state of perpetual contest for the goods of this life, and, by consequence, of perpetual danger to those who *abounded*, and of temptation to those that were in *want*.

The Jews enjoyed a very ample communication of the divine will, and had a religion which an inspired legislator had prescribed; but even to this nation, the only nation free from idolatry, and ac-

quainted with the perfections of the *true* God, was the doctrine of a future state so obscurely revealed, that it was not *necessarily* consequential to the reception or observation of their *practical* religion. The Sadducees, who *acknowledged* the authority of the Mosaical law, yet *denied* the separate existence of the soul—had no expectation of a future state. They held that there was no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit.

This was not in those times the *general* state of the Jewish nation; the Pharisees held the resurrection, and with them probably far the greater part of the people; but that any man could be a Jew, and yet deny a future state, is a sufficient proof that it had not yet been *clearly revealed*, and that it was reserved for the preachers of Christianity to bring life and immortality to light. In such a degree of light they are now placed, that they can be denied or doubted no longer, but as the *Gospel*, that shows them, is doubted or denied. It is now certain that we are *here*, not in our *total*, nor in our *ultimate existence*, but in a state of exercise and probation, commanded to qualify ourselves, by pure hearts and virtuous actions, for the enjoyment of future felicity in the presence of God; and prohibited to break the laws which his wisdom has given us, under the penal sanction of banishment from *heaven* into *regions of misery*.

Yet, notwithstanding the express declaration of our Saviour, and the constant reference of our actions and duties to a future state, throughout the whole volume of the New Testament, there are yet, as in the apostles' time, men who are deceived, who act as if they thought God would be mocked or

deceived, and who appear to forget, that “whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.”

From this important caution, given by the apostle immediately to those whom he was then directing, and consequently to all professors of the religion of Christ, occasion may be taken to consider,

First, How sinners are “deceived.”

Secondly, How certain it is, that “God is not mocked.”

Thirdly, In what sense it is to be understood, that “whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.”

In examining, first, how sinners are deceived, it will immediately occur to us, that no man is deceived to his damnation but by the devil himself. The subtleties of the devil are undoubtedly many; he has probably the power of presenting opportunities of sin, and at the same time of inflaming the passions, of suggesting evil desires, and interrupting holy meditations; but his power is so limited by the Governor of the universe, that he cannot hurt us without our own consent; his power is but like that of a wicked companion, who may solicit us to crimes or follies, but with whom we feel no necessity of complying: he therefore that yields to temptation has the greater part in his own destruction; he has been warned of his danger, he has been taught his duty; and if these warnings and instructions have had no effect, he may be said voluntarily to desert the right way, and not so much to be deceived by another, as to deceive himself.

Of self-deceit, in the great business of our lives, there are various modes. The far greater part of

mankind deceive themselves by willing negligence, by refusing to think on their real state, lest such thoughts should trouble their quiet or interrupt their pursuits. To live religiously, is to walk, not by sight, but by faith ; to act in confidence of things unseen, in hope of future recompense, and in fear of future punishment. To abstract the thoughts from things spiritual is not difficult ; things future do not obtrude themselves upon the senses, and therefore easily give way to external objects. He that is willing to forget religion may quickly lose it ; and that most men are willing to forget it, experience informs us. If we look into the gay or the busy world, we see every eye directed towards pleasure or advantage, and every hour filled with expectation, or occupied by employment ; and day passed after day in the enjoyment of success, or the vexation of disappointment.

Nor is it true only of men who are engaged in enterprises of hazard, which restrain the faculties to the utmost, and keep attention always upon the stretch. Religion is not only neglected by the projector and adventurer, by men who suspend their happiness on the slender thread of artifice, or stand tottering upon the point of chance. For, if we visit the most cool and regular parts of the community ; if we turn our eye to the farm or to the shop, where one year glides uniformly after another, and nothing new or important is either expected or dreaded ; yet still the same indifference about eternity will be found. There is no interest so small, nor engagement so slight, but that, if it be followed and expanded, it may be sufficient to keep religion out of the thoughts. Many men may be observed, not

agitated by very violent passions, nor overborne by any powerful habits, nor depraved by any great degrees of wickedness ; men who are honest dealers, faithful friends, and inoffensive neighbours ; who yet have no vital principle of religion ; who live wholly without self-examination, and indulge any desire that happens to arise, with very little resistance or compunction ; who hardly know what it is to combat a temptation or to repent of a fault ; but go on, neither self-approved nor self-condemned ; not endeavouring after any excellence, nor reforming any vicious practice or irregular desire. They have no care of futurity, neither is God in all their thoughts ; they direct none of their actions to his glory ; they do nothing with the hope of pleasing ; they avoid nothing for the fear of offending him. Those men want not much of being religious ; they have nothing more than casual views to reform ; and, from being peaceable and temperate heathens, might, if they would once awaken to their eternal interest, become pious and exemplary Christians. But let them not be deceived ; they cannot suppose that God will accept him who never wished to be accepted by him, or made his will the rule of action.

Others there are, who, without attending to the written revelation of God's will, form to themselves a scheme of conduct in which vice is mingled with virtue, and who cover from themselves, and hope to cover from God, the indulgence of some criminal desire or the continuance of some vicious habit, by a few splendid instances of public spirit, or some few effusions of occasional bounty : but to these men it may, with emphatical propriety, be urged,

that " God is not mocked ;" he will not be worshipped nor obeyed but according to his own laws.

The mode of self-deception which prevails most in the world, and by which the greatest number of souls is at last betrayed to destruction, is the art which we are all too apt to practise, of putting far from us the evil day, of setting the hour of death, and the day of account, at a great distance.

That death is certain, every one knows ; nor is it less known, that life is destroyed, at all ages, by a thousand causes ; that the strong and the vigorous are liable to diseases, and that caution and temperance afford no security against the final stroke. Yet, as the thought of dissolution is dreadful, we do not willingly admit it ; the desire of life is connected with animation ; every living being shrinks from his destruction : to wish, and to hope, are never far asunder ; as we wish for long life, we hope that our wishes will be granted ; and what we hope, we either believe, or do not examine. So tenaciously does our credulity lay hold of life, that it is rare to find any man so old, as not to expect an addition to his years ; or so far wasted and enfeebled with disease, as not to flatter himself with hopes of recovery.

To those who procrastinate amendment in hopes of better opportunities in future time, it is too often vainly urged by the preacher, and vainly suggested by a thousand examples, that the hour of death is uncertain. This, which ought to be the cause of their terror, is the ground of their hope ; that, as death is uncertain, it may be distant. This uncertainty is, in effect, the great support of the whole system of life. The man who died yesterday had

purchased an estate, to which he intended some time to retire; or built a house, which he was hereafter to inhabit; and planted gardens and groves, that, in a certain number of years, were to supply delicacies to his feasts, and shades to his meditations. He is snatched away, and has left his designs and his labours to others.

As men please themselves with felicities to be enjoyed in the days of leisure and retreat; so, among these felicities, it is not uncommon to design a reformation of life, and a course of piety. Among the more enlightened and judicious part of mankind, there are many who live in a continual disapprobation of their own conduct, who know, that they do every day what they ought to leave undone, and every day leave undone what they ought to do; and who therefore consider themselves as living under the divine displeasure, in a state in which it would be very dangerous to die. Such men answer the reproaches of conscience with sincerity and intention of performance, but which they consider as debts to be discharged at some remote time. They neither sin with stupid negligence, nor with impious defiance of the divine laws; they fear the punishments denounced against sin, but pacify their anxiety with possibilities of repentance, and with a plan of life to be led according to the strict precepts of religion, and to be closed at last by a death softened by holy consolations. Projects of future piety are perhaps not less common than of future pleasure, and are, as there is reason to fear, not less commonly interrupted; with this dreadful difference, that he who misses his intended pleasure, escapes a disappointment; but he who is cut off

before the season of repentance, is exposed to the vengeance of an angry God.

Whoever has been deluded by this infatuation, and has hitherto neglected those duties which he intends some time to perform, is admonished, by all the principles of prudence, and all the course of nature, to consider, how much he ventures, and with how little probability in his favour. The continuance of life, though, like all other things, adjusted by Providence, may be properly considered by us casual; and wisdom always directs us, not to leave that to chance which may be made certain, and not to venture any thing upon chance which it will much hurt us to lose.

He who, accused by his conscience of habitual disobedience, defers his reformation, apparently leaves his soul in the power of chance. We are in full possession of the *present* moment: let the *present* moment be improved; let that which must necessarily be done some time be no longer neglected. Let us remember, that if our lot should fall otherwise than we suppose; if we are of the number of them to whom length of life is not granted; we lose what can never be recovered, and what will never be recompensed, the mercy of God and the joys of futurity.

That long life is not commonly granted, is sufficiently apparent; for life is called long, not as being, at its greatest length, of much duration, but as being longer than common. Since, therefore, the common condition of man is not to live long, we have no reason to conclude that what happens to few will happen to us.

But to abate our confidence in our own resolutions, it is to be remembered, that though we should arrive at the great year destined for the change of life, it is by no means certain that we shall effect what we have purposed. Age is shackled with infirmity and diseases. Immediate pain and present vexation will then do what amusement and gaiety did before ; will enchain the attention, and occupy the thoughts, and leave little vacancy for the past or future. Whoever suffers great pain, has no other care than to obtain ease ; and if ease is for a time obtained, he values it too much, to lessen it by painful reflection.

Neither is an efficacious repentance so easy a work, as that we may be sure of performing it at the time appointed by ourselves. The longer habits have been indulged, the more imperious they become ; it is not by bidding them to be gone, that we can at once dismiss them : they may be suppressed and lie dormant for a time, and resume their force, at an unexpected moment, by some sudden temptation ; they can be subdued only by continued caution and repeated conflicts.

The longer sin has been indulged, the more irksome will be the retrospect of life. So much uneasiness will be suffered, at the review of years spent in vicious enjoyment, that there is reason to fear, lest that delay, which began in the love of pleasure, will be continued for fear of pain.

Neither is it certain, that the grace, without which no man can correct his own corruption, when it has been offered and refused, will be offered again ; or that he who stopped his ears against the

first call, will be vouchsafed a second. *He* cannot expect to be received among the servants of God, who will obey him only at his own time ; for such presumption is, in some degree, a mockery of God ; and we are to consider,

Secondly, How certain it is, that “ God is not mocked.”

God is not mocked in any sense. He will not be mocked with counterfeit piety, he will not be mocked with idle resolutions ; but the sense in which the text declares that God is not mocked, seems to be, that God will not suffer his decrees to be invalidated ; he will not leave his promises unfulfilled, nor his threats unexecuted. And this will easily appear, if we consider, that promises and threats can only become ineffectual by change of mind, or want of power. God cannot change his will ; “ he is not a man that he should repent ;” what he has spoken will surely come to pass. Neither can he want power to execute his purposes : he who spoke, and the world was made, can speak again, and it will perish. God’s “ arm is not shortened, that he cannot save ;” neither is it shortened, that he cannot punish ; and that he will do to every man according to his works, will be shown, when we have considered,

Thirdly, In what sense it is to be understood, that “ whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.”

To sow and to reap are figurative terms. To sow, signifies to act ; and to reap, is to receive the product of our actions. As no man can sow one sort of grain, and reap another, in the ordinary pro-

cess of nature ; as no man gathers grapes of thorns or figs of thistles ; or, when he scatters tares in the furrows, gathers wheat into his garners ; so, in the final dispensations of Providence, the same correspondence shall be found in the moral system ; every action shall at last be followed by its due consequences ; we shall be treated according to our obedience or transgressions ; the good shall not miss their reward, nor the wicked escape their punishment ; but when men shall give account of their own works, they that have done good shall pass into everlasting life, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

Let us, therefore, at this and at all times, most heartily and fervently beseech Almighty God to give us faithful and sincere repentance, to pardon and forgive us all our sins, to endow us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, and to amend our lives according to his holy will and commandments.

SERMON XI.

1 PETER, CHAP. III. VERSE 8.

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.

THE apostle, directing this epistle to the new converts scattered over the provinces of Asia, having laid before them the great advantage of the religion which they had embraced, no less than the salvation of their souls, and the high price for which they were redeemed, the precious blood of Christ; proceeds to explain to them what is required by their *new* profession. He reminds them, that they live among the heathen, of whom it must necessarily be supposed, that every one watched their conduct with suspicious vigilance; and that it is *their* duty to recommend *right belief by virtuous practice*; that their *example*, as well as their *arguments*, may propagate the truth.

In this course of instruction, he first mentions the civil relation of governors and subjects; and enjoins them to honour the supreme magistrate, and to respect all subordinate authority, which is established for the preservation of order, and the administration of justice. He then descends to domestic connexions, and recommends to servants obedience and patience, and to husbands and wives their relative and respective duties; to husbands

tenderness, and to wives obedience, modesty, and gentleness; that the husband, who is not yet converted by the power of exhortation, may be drawn to the religion of his wife, by perceiving its good effects upon her conversation and behaviour.

He then extends his precepts to greater generality, and lays down a short system of domestic virtue, to be universally adopted; directing the new Christians,

First, To be all of one mind.

By the union of minds which the apostle recommends, it must be supposed, that he means not speculative, but practical union; not similitude of opinions, but similitude of virtues. In religious opinions, if there was then any disagreement, they had then living authority to which they might have recourse; and their business was, probably, at that time, more to defend their common faith against the heathen, than to debate any subtilties of opinion among themselves. But there are innumerable questions, in which vanity or interest engages mankind, which have little connexion with their eternal interest; and yet often inflame the passions, and produce dislike and malevolence. Sects in philosophy, and factions in the state, easily excite mutual contempt, or mutual hatred. He, whose opinions are censured, feels the reputation of his understanding injured; he, whose party is opposed, finds his influence resisted, and, perhaps, his power, or his profit, in danger of diminution. It could not be the intention of St. Peter, that all men should think alike, either of the operations of nature, or the transactions of the state; but that

those who thought differently should live in peace ; that contradiction should not exasperate the disputants, or that the heat should end with the controversy ; and that the opposition of party (for such there must sometimes be) should not canker the private thoughts, or raise personal hatred or insidious enmity. He required that they should be all of one *moral* mind, that they should all wish and promote the happiness of each other, that the danger of a Christian should be a common cause, and that no one should wish for advantage by the mis-carriage of another.

To suppose that there should, in any community, be no difference of opinion, is to suppose all, of whom that community consists, to be wise alike, which cannot happen ; or that the understanding of one part is submitted to that of another, which, however, would not produce uniformity of opinion, but only of profession ; and is, in important questions, contrary to that sincerity and integrity which truth requires, and an infraction of that liberty which reason allows. But that men of different opinions should live at peace, is the true effect of that humility, which makes each esteem others better than himself, and of that moderation, which reason approves and charity commands. Be ye, therefore, all of one mind ; let charity be the predominant and universal principle that pervades your lives, and regulates your actions.

Secondly, They are directed by the apostle, to live as men which have compassion one of another.

The word which is rendered *having compassion*, seems to include a greater latitude of signification,

than the word compassion commonly obtains. Compassion is not used, but in the sense of tender regard to the unhappiness of another. But the term used by St. Peter may mean mutually feeling for each other, receiving the same impressions from the same things; and this sense seems to be given it by one of the translators (Castalio). The precept will then be connected and consequential; "Be all of one mind, each feeling, by sympathy, the affections of another."

Sympathy, the quality recommended in the text, as it has been now explained, is the great source of social happiness. To gain affection, and to preserve concord, it is necessary not only to mourn with those that mourn, but to rejoice with them that rejoice.

To feel sincere and honest joy at the success of another, though it is necessary to true friendship, is, perhaps, neither very common nor very easy. There is in every mind, implanted by nature, a desire of superiority, which counteracts the pleasure which the sight of success and happiness ought always to impart. Between men of equal condition, and, therefore, willingly consulting with each other, any flow of fortune, which produces inequality, makes him who is left behind look with less content on his own condition, and with less kindness on him who has reduced him to inferiority. The advancement of a superior gives pain, by increasing that distance, by difference of station, which was thought already greater than could be claimed by any difference; and the rise of an inferior excites jealousy, lest he that went before should be overtaken by his follower. As cruelty looks upon mi-

sery without partaking pain, so envy beholds increase of happiness without partaking joy.

Envy and cruelty, the most hateful passions of the human breast, are both counteracted by this precept, which commanded the Christians of Asia, and now commands us, who succeed them in the profession of the same faith, and the consciousness of the same frailties, to feel one for another. He whose mind is so harmonized to the interest of his neighbour, that good and evil are common to them both, will neither obstruct his rise, nor insult his fall; but will be willing to cooperate with him through all the vicissitudes of life and dispensations of Providence; to honour him that is exalted, to help him that is depressed. He will control all those emotions which comparison produces; he will not consider himself as made poorer by another's wealth, or richer by another's poverty; he will look, without malignity, upon superiority, either external or intellectual; he will be willing to learn of those that excel in wisdom, and receive instruction with thankfulness; he will be willing to impart his knowledge, without fearing lest he should impair his own importance, by the improvement of his hearer.

How much this generous sympathy would conduce to the comfort and stability of life, a little consideration will convince us. Whence are all the arts of slanders and depreciation, but from our unwillingness to see others greater, or wiser, or happier, than ourselves? Whence is a great part of the splendour, and all the ostentation of high rank, but to receive pleasure from the contemplation of those who cannot attain dignity and riches, or to

give pain to them who look, with malignity, on those acquisitions which they have desired in vain? Whence is the pain which vanity suffers from neglect, but that it exacted painful homage; and honour, which is received with more delight, as it is more unwillingly conferred? The pleasures of comparative excellence have commonly their source in the pain of others, and, therefore, are such pleasures as the apostle warns the Christians not to indulge.

Thirdly, In pursuance of his injunctions to be of one mind, and to sympathize one with another, he directs them, "to love as brethren," or to be lovers of the brethren. (Hammond.) He endeavours to establish a species of fraternity among Christians; that, as they have all one faith, they may have all one interest, and consider themselves as a family that must prosper, or suffer, all together, and share whatever may befall, either of good or evil. The highest degree of friendship is called brotherly love; and the term by which man is endeared to man, in the language of the Gospel, is the appellation of brother. We are all brethren by our common relation to the universal Father; but that relation is often forgotten amongst the contrariety of opinions and opposition of passions, which disturb the peace of the world. Ambition has effaced all natural consanguinity, by calling nation to war against nation, and making the destruction of one half of mankind the glory of the other. Christian piety, as it revived and enforced all the original and primeval duties of humanity, so it restored, in some degree, that brotherhood, or foundation of kind-

ness, which naturally arises from some common relation. We are brothers as we are men; we are again brothers as we are Christians: as men, we are brothers by natural necessity; but, as Christians, we are brothers by voluntary choice, and are, therefore, under an apparent obligation to fulfil the relation; first, as it is established by our Creator, and, afterwards, as it is chosen by ourselves. To have the same opinions naturally produces kindness, even when these opinions have no consequence; because we rejoice to find our sentiments approved by the judgment of another. But those who concur in Christianity, have, by that agreement in principles, an opportunity of more than speculative kindness; they may help forward the salvation of each other, by counsel or by reproof, by exhortation, by example; they may recall each other from deviations, they may excite each other to good works.

Charity, or universal love, is named by Saint Paul, as the greatest and most illustrious of Christian virtues; and our Saviour himself has told us, that by this it shall be known that we are his disciples, if we love one another. Every affection of the soul exerts itself more strongly at the approach of its proper object. Christians particularly love one another, because they can confer and receive spiritual benefits. They are, indeed, to love all men; and how much the primitive preachers of the Gospel loved those that differed from them, they sufficiently showed, when they incurred death by their endeavours to make them Christians. This is the extent of evangelical love; to bring into the light of truth those who are in darkness, and to

keep those from falling back into darkness to whom the light has been shown.

Since life overflows with misery, and the world is filled with evil, natural and moral, with temptation and danger, with calamity and wickedness; there are very frequent opportunities of showing our unanimity, our sympathy, and our brotherly love, by attempts to remove pressures, and mitigate misfortunes. St. Peter, therefore, particularly presses the duty of commiseration, by calling upon us,

Fourthly, To be pitiful; not to look negligently or scornfully on the miseries of others; but to apply such consolation and assistance as Providence puts into our power.

To attempt an enumeration of all the opportunities which may occur for the exercise of pity, would be to form a catalogue of all the ills to which human nature is exposed, to count over all the possibilities of calamity, and recount the depredations of time, the pains of disease, the blasts of casualty, and the mischiefs of malevolence.

Wherever the eye is turned, it sees much misery, and there is much which it sees not; many complaints are heard, and there are many pangs without complaint. The external acts of mercy, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to visit the sick and the prisoners, we see daily opportunities of performing; and it may be hoped, they are not neglected by those that abound with what others want.

But there are other calls upon charity. There are sick minds as well as sick bodies; there are

understandings perplexed with scruples, there are consciences tormented with guilt; nor can any greater benefit be conferred, than that of settling doubts or comforting despair, and restoring a disquieted soul to hope and tranquillity.

The duty of commiseration is so strongly pressed by the Gospel, that none deny its obligation. But, as the measures of beneficence are left undefined, every man necessarily determines for himself whether he has contributed his share to the necessities of others; and, amidst the general depravity of the world, it can be no wonder, if there are found some who tax themselves very lightly, and are satisfied with giving very little.

Some readily find out, that where there is distress there is vice, and easily discover the crime of feeding the lazy or encouraging the dissolute. To promote vice is certainly unlawful; but we do not always encourage vice when we relieve the vicious. It is sufficient that our brother is in want; by which way he brought his want upon him, let us not too curiously inquire. We likewise are sinners. In cases undoubted and notorious, some caution may be properly used, that charity be not perverted; but no man is so bad as to lose his title to Christian kindness. If a bad man be suffered to perish, how shall he repent?

Not more justifiable is the omission of duty, which proceeds from an expectation of better opportunities, or more pressing exigencies. Of such excuses, or of such purposes, there can be no end. Delay not till to-morrow what thou mayest do to-day! A good work is now in thy power; be quick, and perform it! By *thy* refusal, *others* may be dis-

couraged from asking ; or so near may be the end of thy life, that thou mayest never do what is in thy heart. Every call to charity is a gift of God, to be received with thankfulness, and improved with diligence.

There are, likewise, many offices of kindness which cannot properly be classed under the duty of commiseration, as they do not presuppose either misery or necessity ; and yet are of great use for conciliating affection, and smoothing the paths of life : and, as it is of great importance that goodness should have the power of gaining the affections, the apostle has not neglected those subordinate duties ; for he commands Christians,

Fifthly, To be courteous.

For courteous some substitute the word humble ; the difference may not be considered as great, for pride is a quality that obstructs courtesy.

That a precept of courtesy is by no means unworthy of the gravity and dignity of an apostolical mandate, may be gathered from the pernicious effects which all must have observed to have arisen from harsh strictness and sour virtue ; such as refuses to mingle in harmless gaiety, or give countenance to innocent amusements ; or which transacts the petty business of the day with a gloomy ferociousness that clouds existence. Goodness of this character is more formidable than lovely ; it may drive away vice from its presence, but will never persuade it to stay to be amended ; it may teach, it may remonstrate, but the hearer will seek for more mild instruction. To those, therefore, by whose conversation the heathens were to be drawn

away from error and wickedness; it is the apostle's precept, that they be courteous, that they accommodate themselves, as far as innocence allows, to the will of others; that they should practise all the established modes of civility, seize all occasions of cultivating kindness, and live with the rest of the world with an amicable reciprocation of cursory civility; that Christianity might not be accused of making men less cheerful as companions, less sociable as neighbours, or less useful as friends.

Such is the system of domestic virtue which the apostle recommends. His words are few, but their meaning is sufficient to fill the greater part of the circle of life. Let us remember to be all of one mind, so as to grieve and rejoice together; to confirm, by constant benevolence, that brotherhood, which creation and redemption have constituted! Let us commiserate and relieve affliction, and endear ourselves by general gentleness and affability: it will from hence soon appear how much goodness is to be loved, and how much human nature is meliorated by religion.

SERMON XII.

ECCLESIASTES, CHAP. I. VERSE 14.

*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun;
and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

THAT all human actions terminate in vanity, and all human hopes will end in vexation, is a position from which nature withholds our credulity, and which our fondness for the present life and worldly enjoyments disposes us to doubt, however forcibly it may be urged upon us by reason or experience.

Every man will readily enough confess, that his own condition discontents him, and that he has not yet been able, with all his labour, to make happiness, or, with all his inquiries, to find it. But he still thinks, it is somewhere to be found, or by some means to be procured. His envy sometimes persuades him to imagine that others possess it; and his ambition points the way, by which he supposes that he shall reach, at last, the station to which it is annexed. Every one wants something to happiness; and, when he has gained what he first wanted, he wants something else; he wears out life in efforts and pursuits, and, perhaps, dies, regretting that he must leave the world, when he is about to enjoy it.

So great is our interest, or so great we think it, to believe ourselves able to procure our own hap-

piness, that experience never convinces us of our impotence; and, indeed, our miscarriages might be reasonably enough imputed by us to our own unskilfulness or ignorance, if we were able to derive intelligence from no experience but our own. But surely we may be content to credit the general voice of mankind, complaining incessantly of general infelicity; and when we see the restlessness of the young, and the peevishness of the old; when we find the daring and the active combating misery, and the calm and humble lamenting it; when the vigorous are exhausting themselves in struggles with their own condition, and the old and the wise retiring from the contest in weariness and despondency; we may be content at last to conclude, that if happiness had been to be found, some would have found it, and that it is vain to search longer for what all have missed.

But though our obstinacy should hold out against common experience and common authority, it might, at least, give way to the declaration of Solomon, who has left this testimony to succeeding ages; that all human pursuits and labours are vanity. From the like conclusion, made by other men, we may escape, by considering that *their* experience was small, and *their* power narrow; that they pronounced with confidence upon that which they could not know; and that many pleasures might be above their reach, and many more beyond their observation: *they* may be considered as uttering the dictates of discontent, rather than persuasion; and as speaking, not so much of the general state of things, as of their own share; and their own situation.

But the character of Solomon leaves no room for subterfuge ; he did not judge of what he did not know. He had in his possession whatever power and riches, and, what is still more, whatever wisdom and knowledge could confer. As he understood the vegetable creation, from the cedar of Libanus to the hyssop on the wall, so there is no doubt but he had taken a survey of all the gradations of human life, from the throne of the prince to the shepherd's cottage. He had in his hand all the instruments of happiness, and in his mind the skill to apply them. Every power of delight which others possessed, he had authority to summon or wealth to purchase ; all that royal prosperity could supply, was accumulated upon him ; at home he had peace, and in foreign countries he had honour ; what every nation could supply, was poured down before him. If power be grateful, he was a king ; if there be pleasure in knowledge, he was the wisest of mankind : if wealth can purchase happiness, he had so much gold that silver was little regarded. Over all these advantages presided a mind in the highest degree disposed to magnificence and voluptuousness, so eager in pursuit of gratification, that, alas ! after every other price had been bid for happiness, religion and virtue were brought to the sale. But, after the anxiety of his inquiries, the weariness of his labours, and the loss of his innocence, he obtained only this conclusion : " I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

That this result of Solomon's experience, thus solemnly bequeathed by him to all generations,

may not be transmitted to us without its proper use, let us diligently consider,

First, In what sense we are to understand that all is vanity.

Secondly, How far the conviction, that all is vanity, ought to influence the conduct of life.

Thirdly, What consequences the serious and religious mind may deduce from the position, that all is vanity.

When we examine, first, in what sense we are to understand that all is vanity, we must remember, that the preacher is not speaking of religious practices, or of any actions immediately commanded by God, or directly referred to him; but of such employments as we pursue by choice, and such works as we perform in hopes of a recompense in the present life; such as flatter the imagination with pleasing scenes, and probable increase of temporal felicity; of this he determines that all is vanity, and every hour confirms his determination.

The event of all human endeavours is uncertain. He that plants may gather no fruit; he that sows may reap no harvest. Even the most simple operations are liable to miscarriage, from causes which we cannot foresee; and, if we could foresee them, cannot prevent. What can be more vain than the confidence of man, when the annual provision made for the support of life is not only exposed to the uncertainty of weather, and the variation of the sky, but lies at the mercy of the reptiles of the earth or the insects of the air? The rain and the wind he cannot command; the cater-

pillar he cannot destroy, and the locust he cannot drive away.

But these effects, which require only the concurrence of natural causes, though they depend little upon human power, are yet made by Providence regular and certain, in comparison with those extensive and complicated undertakings which must be brought to pass by the agency of man, and which require the union of many understandings, and the cooperations of many hands. The history of mankind is little else than a narrative of designs which have failed, and hopes that have been disappointed. In all matters of emulation and contest, the success of one implies the defeat of another, and at least half the transaction terminates in misery: and, in designs not directly contrary to the interest of another, and therefore not opposed either by artifice or violence, it frequently happens that, by negligence or mistake or unseasonable, officiousness, a very hopeful project is brought to nothing.

To find examples of disappointment and uncertainty, we need not raise our thoughts to the interests of nations, nor follow the warrior to the field, or the statesman to the council. The little transactions of private families are entangled with perplexities; and the hourly occurrences of common life are filling the world with discontent and complaint. Every man hopes for kindness from his friends, diligence from his servants, and obedience from his children; yet friends are often unfaithful, servants negligent, and children rebellious. Human wisdom has, indeed, exhausted its power in giving rules for the conduct of life;

but those rules are themselves but vanities. They are difficult to be observed, and, though observed, are uncertain in the effect.

The labours of man are not only uncertain but imperfect. If we perform what we designed, we yet do not obtain what we expected. What appeared great when we desired it, seems little when it is attained; the wish is still unsatisfied, and something always remains behind, without which the gratification is incomplete. He that rises to greatness, finds himself in danger: he that obtains riches, perceives that he cannot gain esteem: he that is caressed, sees interest lurking under kindness: and he that hears his own praises, suspects that he is flattered. Discontent and doubt are always pursuing us. Our endeavours end without performance, and performance ends without satisfaction.

But, since this uncertainty and imperfection is the lot which our Creator has appointed for us, we are to inquire,

Secondly, How far the conviction, that all is vanity, ought to influence the conduct of life.

Human actions may be distinguished into various classes. Some are actions of duty, which can never be vain, because God will reward them: yet these actions, considered as terminating in this world, will often produce vexation. It is our duty to admonish the vicious, to instruct the ignorant, and relieve the poor; and our admonitions will, sometimes, produce anger instead of amendment; our instructions will be, sometimes, bestowed upon the perverse, the stupid, and the inattentive; and

our charity will be, sometimes, misapplied by those that receive it ; and, instead of feeding the hungry, will pamper the intemperate : but these disappointments do not make good actions vain, though they show us how much all success depends upon causes on which we have no influence.

There are, likewise, actions of necessity : these are often vain and vexations ; but such is the order of the world, that they cannot be omitted. He that will eat bread, must plough and sow ; though it is not certain that he who ploughs and sows shall eat bread. It is appointed that life should be sustained by labour ; and we must not sink down in sullen idleness, when our industry is permitted to miscarry. We shall often have occasion to remember the sentence denounced by the preacher upon all that is done under the sun : but we must still prosecute our business, confess our imbecility, and turn our eyes upon Him, whose mercy is over all his works, and who, though he humbles our pride, will succour our necessities.

Works of absolute necessity are few and simple ; a very great part of human diligence is laid out in accommodations of ease, or refinements of pleasure ; and the further we pass beyond the boundaries of necessity, the more we lose ourselves in the regions of vanity, and the more we expose ourselves to vexation of spirit. As we extend our pleasures, we multiply our wants : the pain of hunger is easily appeased ; but to surmount the disgust of appetite vitiated by indulgence all the arts of luxury are required, and all are often vain. When to the enjoyments of sense are superadded the delights of fancy, we form a scheme of happi-

ness that never can be complete, for we can always imagine more than we possess. All social pleasures put us more or less in the power of others, who sometimes cannot, and sometimes will not, please us. Conversations of argument often end in bitterness of controversy; and conversations of mirth, in petulance and folly. Friendship is violated by interest or broken by passion, and benevolence finds its kindness bestowed on the worthless and ungrateful.

But most certain is the disappointment of him who places his happiness in comparative good, and considers, not what he himself wants, but what others have. The delight of eminence must, by its own nature, be rare; because he that is eminent must have many below him; and therefore, if we suppose such desires general, as very general they are, *the happiness of a few* must arise from *the misery of many*. He that places his delight in the extent of his renown, is, in some degree, at the mercy of every tongue; not only malevolence, but indifference, may disturb him; and he may be pained, not only by those who speak ill, but by those, likewise, that say nothing.

As every engine of artificial motion, as it consists of more parts, is in more danger of deficiency and disorder; so every effect, as it requires the agency of greater numbers, is more likely to fail. Yet what pleasure is granted to man, beyond the gross gratifications of sense, common to him with other animals, that does not demand the help of others, and the help of greater numbers, as the pleasure is sublimated and enlarged? And since such is the constitution of things, that whatever can give plea-

sure can likewise cause uneasiness, there is little hope that uneasiness will be long escaped. Of them whose offices are necessary to felicity, some will be perverse, and some will be unskilful ; some will negligently withhold their contributions, and some will enviously withdraw them. The various and opposite directions of the human mind, which divide men into so many different occupations, keep all the inhabitants of the earth perpetually busy ; but, when it is considered that the business of every man is to counteract the purpose of some other man, it will appear, that universal activity cannot contribute much to universal happiness. Of those that contend, one must necessarily be overcome ; and he that prevails never has his labour rewarded to his wish, but finds that he has been contending for that which cannot satisfy, and engaged in a contest where even victory is vanity.

What, then, is the influence which the conviction of this unwelcome truth ought to have upon our conduct ? It ought to teach us humility, patience, and diffidence. When we consider how little we know of the distant consequence of our own actions, how little the greatest personal qualities can protect us from misfortune, how much all our importance depends upon the favour of others, how uncertainly that favour is bestowed, and how easily it is lost ; we shall find that we have very little reason to be proud. That which is most apt to elate the thoughts, height of place, and greatness of power, is the gift of others. No man can, by any natural or intrinsic faculties, maintain himself in a state of superiority ; he is exalted to his place, whatever it be, by the concurrence of those who

are for a time content to be counted his inferiors ; he has no authority in himself ; he is only able to control some by the help of others. If dependence be a state of humiliation, every man has reason to be humble, for every man is dependent.

But, however pleasing these considerations may be, however unequal our condition is to all our wishes or conceptions, we are not to admit impatience into our bosoms, or increase the evils of life by vain throbs of discontent. To live in a world where all is vanity, has been decreed by our Creator to be the lot of man—a lot which we cannot alter by murmuring, but may soften by submission.

The consideration of the vanity of all human purposes and projects, deeply impressed upon the mind, necessarily produces that diffidence in all worldly good, which is necessary to the regulation of our passions and the security of our innocence. In a smooth course of prosperity, an unobstructed progression from wish to wish, while the success of one design facilitates another, and the opening prospect of life shows pleasures at a distance ; to conclude that the passage will be always clear, and that the delights which solicit from far, will, when they are attained, fill the soul with enjoyments, must necessarily produce violent desires and eager pursuits, contempt of those that are behind, and malignity to those that are before : but the full persuasion that all earthly good is uncertain in the attainment, and unstable in the possession, and the frequent recollection of the slender supports on which we rest, and the dangers which are always hanging over us, will dictate inoffensive modesty and mild benevolence. *He* does not rashly treat

another with contempt, who doubts the duration of his own superiority : *he* will not refuse assistance to the distressed, who supposes that he may quickly need it himself. He that considers how imperfectly human wisdom can judge of that which has not been tried, will seldom think any possibilities of advantage worthy of vehement desire. As his hopes are moderate, his endeavours will be calm. He will not fix his fond hopes upon things which he knows to be vanity, but will enjoy this world as one who knows that he does not possess it : and that this is the disposition which becomes our condition, will appear when we consider,

Thirdly, What consequences the serious and religious mind may draw from the position, that all is vanity.

When the present state of man is considered ; when an estimate is made of his hopes, his pleasures, and his possessions ; when his hopes appear to be deceitful, his labours ineffectual, his pleasures unsatisfactory, and his possessions fugitive, it is natural to wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities ; and from this wish it is reasonable to infer, that such a state is designed for us by that infinite wisdom, which, as it does nothing in vain, has not created minds with comprehensions never to be filled. When revelation is consulted, it appears that such a state is really promised ; and that, by the contempt of worldly pleasures, it is to be obtained. We then find that, instead of lamenting the imperfection of earthly

things, we have reason to pour out thanks to Him who orders all for our good ; that he has made the world, such as often deceives, and often afflicts us ; that the charms of interest are not such as our frailty is unable to resist ; but that we have such interruptions of our pursuits, and such languor in our enjoyments, such pains of body and anxiety of mind, as repress desire, and weaken temptation ; and happy will it be if we follow the gracious directions of Providence, and determine that no degree of earthly felicity shall be purchased with a crime ; if we resolve no longer to bear the chains of sin, to employ all our endeavours upon transitory and imperfect pleasures, or to divide our thoughts between the world and heaven ; but to bid farewell to sublunary vanities, to endure no longer an unprofitable vexation of spirit ; but, with pure heart and steady faith, to “fear God, and to keep his commandments, and remember that this is the whole of man.”

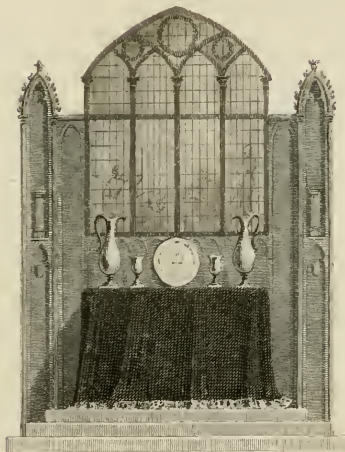
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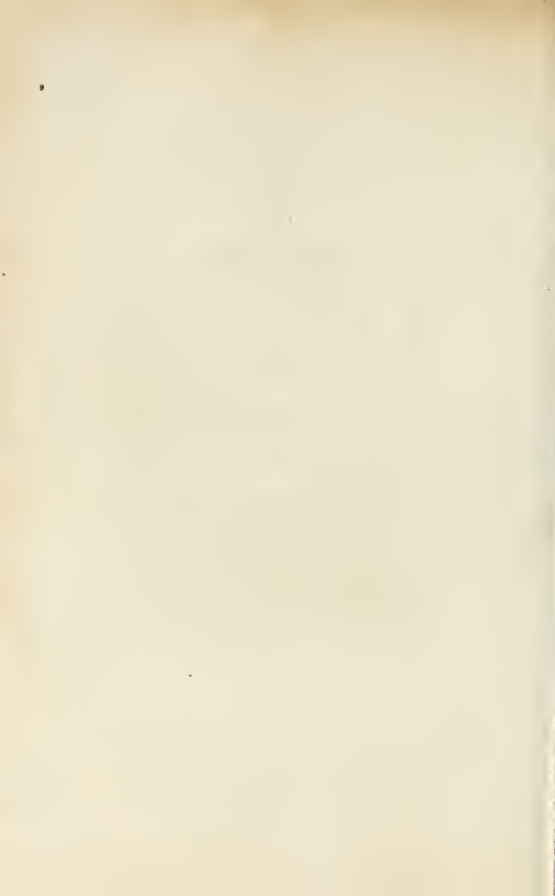
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DR. JOHNSON'S SERMONS.

SERMON XIII.

2 TIMOTHY, CHAP. III. PART OF THE 5th VERSE.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

WHEN St. Paul, in the precepts given to Timothy for his instruction how to regulate and purify the conversation of the first Christians, directed him to take care that those men should be avoided, as dangerous and pestilent, who, having the form of godliness, denied the power; it is reasonable to believe, that he meant, in his direct and immediate intention, to awaken his caution against gross hypocrites; such as may easily be supposed to have appeared too often in the most early seminaries of Christianity; who made an appearance of righteousness subservient to worldly interest; and whose conversion, real or pretended, gave them an opportunity of preying upon artless simplicity, by claiming that kindness which the first believers showed to one another; and obtaining benefactions which they did not want, and eating bread for which they did not labour.

To impostors of this kind, the peculiar state of

the first Christians would naturally expose them. As they were surrounded by enemies, they were glad to find, in any man, the appearance of a friend ; as they were wearied with importunate contradiction, they were desirous of an interval of respite, by consorting with any one that professed the same opinions ; and what was still more favourable to such impostors, when they had, by embracing an unpopular and persecuted religion, divested themselves, in a great degree, of secular interest, they were likely often to want that vigilance and suspicion which is forced, even upon honest minds, by much converse with the world, and frequent transactions with various characters ; and which our divine Master teaches us to practise, when he commands us to join the “ wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove.” The first Christians must have been, in the highest degree, zealous to strengthen their faith in themselves, and propagate it in others ; and zeal easily spreads the arms, and opens the bosom to an adherent, or a proselyte, as to one that adds another suffrage to truth, and strengthens the support of a good cause. Men of this disposition, and in this state of life, would easily be enamoured of the *form* of godliness, and not soon discover that the *power* was wanting. Men naturally think others like themselves, and therefore a good man is easily persuaded to credit the appearance of virtue.

Hypocrisy, however, was not confined to the apostolic ages. All times, and all places, have produced men, that have endeavoured to gain credit by false pretensions to excellence, and have recommended themselves to kindness or esteem, by spe-

cious professions, and ostentatious displays of counterfeited virtues. It is, however, less necessary now to obviate this kind of fraud, by exhortations to caution ; for that simplicity, which lay open to its operation, is not now very frequently to be found. The hypocrite, in these times, seldom boasts of much success. He is for the most part soon discovered ; and when he is once known, the world will not wait for counsel to avoid him, for the good detest, and the bad despise him. He is hated for his attempts, and scorned for his mis-carriage.

It may therefore be proper to consider the danger of a “ form of righteousness” without the “ power,” in a different and secondary sense, and to examine whether, as there are some who by this form deceive others, there are not some, likewise, that deceive themselves ; who pacify their consciences with an appearance of piety, and live and die in dangerous tranquillity and delusive confidence.

In this inquiry it will be proper to consider,

First, What may be understood by the *form* of godliness, as distinct from the *power*.

Secondly, What is the power of godliness, without which the form is defective and unavailing.

Thirdly, How far it is necessary to the Christian life, that the form and power should subsist together.

Let it therefore be first considered, what may be easily and naturally understood by the form of godliness as distinct from the power.

By the form of godliness may be properly understood, not only a specious practice of religious duties, exhibited to public notice, but all external acts of worship, all rites and ceremonies, all stated observances, and all compliance with temporary and local injunctions and regularities.

The religion of the Jews, from the time of Moses, comprised a great number of burdensome ceremonies, required by God for reasons which perhaps human wisdom has never fully discovered. Of these ceremonies, however, some were typically representative of the Christian institution, and some, by keeping them distinct, by dissimilitude of customs from the nations that surrounded them, had a tendency to secure them from the influence of ill example, and preserve them from the contagion of idolatry.

To the use of observances, thus important, they were confined by the strongest obligations. They were indeed external acts, but they were instituted by divine authority; they were not to be considered merely as instrumental and expedient, as means which might be omitted, if their ends were secured: they were positively enjoined by the supreme Legislator, and were not left to choice or discretion, or secular laws; to the will of the powerful, or the judgment of the prudent.

Yet even these sacred rites might be punctually performed, without making the performer acceptable to God; the blood of bulls and of goats might be poured out in vain, if the desires were not regulated, or the passions subdued. The sacrifices of the oppressor or extortioner, were not an atone-

ment, but an abomination. Forgiveness was obtained, not by incense, but by repentance ; the offender was required to rend his heart, and not his garment ; a contrite and a broken heart was the oblation which the supreme Judge did not despise.

So much was the moral law exalted above all ceremonial institutions, even in that dispensation by which so many ceremonies were commanded, that those two parts of duty were distinguished by the appellations of body and spirit. As the body, separated from the spirit, is a mass lifeless, motionless, and useless ; so the external practice of ritual observances was ineffectual and vain, an action without a meaning, a labour by which nothing was produced. As the spirit puts the limbs into motion, and directs their action to an end, so justice and mercy gave energy to ceremonies, made the oblation grateful, and the worshipper accepted.

The professors of Christianity have few ceremonies indispensably enjoined them. Their religion teaches them to worship God, not with local or temporary ceremonies, but in spirit and in truth ; that is, with internal purity and moral righteousness. For spirit, in this sense, seems to be opposed to the body of external rites, and truth is known to signify, in the biblical language, the sum of those duties which we owe to one another.

Yet such are the temptations of interest and pleasure, and so prevalent is the desire of enjoying at once the pleasures of sin for a season, and the hopes of happiness to eternity, that even the Christian religion has been depraved by artificial modes of piety, and succedaneous practices of reconciliation. Men have been ever persuaded, that by doing

something, to which they think themselves not obliged, they may purchase an exemption from such duties as they find themselves inclined to violate: that they may commute with heaven for a temporal fine, and make rigour atone for relaxity.

In ages and countries in which ignorance has produced and nourished superstition, many artifices have been invented, of practising piety without virtue, and repentance without amendment. The devotion of our blind forefathers consisted, for a great part, in rigorous austerities, laborious pilgrimages, and gloomy retirement; and that which now prevails, in the darker provinces of the popish world, exhausts its power in absurd veneration for some particular saint, expressed too often by honours paid to his image, or in a stated number of prayers, uttered with very little attention, and very frequently with little understanding.

Some of these practices may be, perhaps, justly imputed to the grossness of a people scarcely capable of worship purely intellectual; to the necessity of complying with the weakness of men, who must be taught their duty by material images and sensible impressions. This plea, however, will avail but little in defence of abuses not only permitted, but encouraged by pertinacious vindications, and fictitious miracles.

It is apparent that the Romish clergy have attributed too much efficacy to pious donations and charitable establishments; and that they have made liberality to the church and bounty to the poor equivalent to the whole system of our duty to God and to our neighbour.

Yet nothing can be more repugnant to the ge-

neral tenour of the evangelical revelation, than an opinion that pardon may be bought, and guilt effaced, by a stipulated expiation. We naturally catch the pleasures of the present hour, and gratify the calls of the reigning passion : and what shall hinder the man of violence from outrage and mischief, or restrain the pursuer of interest from fraud and circumvention, when they are told, that after a life passed in disturbing the peace of life, and violating the security of possession, they may die, at last, in peace, by founding an alms-house, without the agonies of deep contrition ?

But error and corruption are often to be found where there are neither Jews nor Papists. Let us not look upon the depravity of others with triumph, nor censure it with bitterness. Every sect may find in its own followers those who have the form of godliness without the power : every man, if he examines his own conduct without intention to be his own flatterer, may, to a certain degree, find it in himself.

To give the heart to God, and to give the whole heart, is very difficult ; the last, the great effort of long labour, fervent prayer, and diligent meditation. Many resolutions are made, and many relapses lamented ; and many conflicts with our own desires, with the powers of the world, and the powers of darkness, must be sustained, before the will of man is made wholly obedient to the will of God.

In the mean time, we are willing to find some way to heaven less difficult and less obstructed, to keep our hopes alive by faint endeavours, and to lull our consciences by such expedients as we may easily practise. Not yet resolved to live wholly to

God, and yet afraid to live wholly to the world, we do something in recompense for that which we neglect, and resign something that we may keep the rest.

To be strictly religious, is difficult; but we may be zealously religious at little expense. By expressing on all occasions our detestation of heresy and popery, and all other horrors, we erect ourselves into champions for truth, without much hazard or trouble. The hopes of zeal are not wholly groundless. Indifference in questions of importance is no amiable quality.—He that is warm for truth, and fearless in its defence, performs one of the duties of a good man; he strengthens his own conviction, and guards others from delusion; but steadiness of belief, and boldness of profession, are yet only part of the form of godliness, which may be attained by those who deny the power.

As almost every man is, by nature or by accident, exposed to danger from particular temptations, and disposed to some vices more than to others; so all are, either by disposition of mind or the circumstances of life, inclined or compelled to some laudable practices. Of this happy tendency it is common to take advantage, by pushing the favourite or the convenient virtue to its utmost extent, and to lose all sense of deficiency in the perpetual contemplation of some single excellence.

Thus some please themselves with a constant regularity of life, and decency of behaviour,—they hear themselves commended, and superadd their own approbation. They know, or might know, that they have secret faults; but, as they are not open to accusation, they are not inquisitive to their

own disquiet; they are satisfied that they do not corrupt others, and that the world will not be worse by their example.

Some are punctual in the attendance on public worship, and, perhaps, in the performance of private devotion. These they know to be great duties, and resolve not to neglect them. It is right they go so far, and with so much that is right they are satisfied: they are diligent in adoration, but defective in obedience.

Such men are often not hypocrites; the virtues which they practise arise from their principles. The man of regularity really hopes that he shall recommend goodness to those that know him. The frequenter of the church really hopes to propitiate his Creator. Their religion is sincere: what is reprehensible is, that it is partial, that the heart is yet not purified, and that yet many inordinate desires remain, not only unsubdued, but unsuspected, under the splendid cover of some specious practice, with which the mind delights itself too much to take a rigorous survey of its own motions.

In condemnation of those who presume to hope that the performance of one duty will obtain excuse for the violation of others, it is affirmed by St. James, that he who breaks one commandment is guilty of all; and he defends his position by observing, that they are all delivered by the same authority.

His meaning is not, that all crimes are equal, or that in any one crime all others are involved; but that the law of God is to be obeyed with complete and unreserved submission; and that he who violates any of its ordinances will not be justified

by his observation of all the rest; since, as the whole is of divine authority, every breach, wilful and unrepented, is an act of rebellion against Omnipotence.

One of the artifices, by which men thus defectively religious deceive themselves, is that of comparing their own behaviour with that of men openly vicious and generally negligent, and inferring that themselves are good, because they suppose that they see others worse. The account of the Pharisee and publican may show us that, in rating our own merit, we are in danger of mistake: but, though the estimate should be right, it is still to be remembered, that he who is not worst may yet fall far below what will be required. Our rule of duty is not "the virtue of men," but "the law of God," from which, alone, we can learn what will be required.

Secondly, What is that power of godliness, without which the form is defective and unavailing?

The power of godliness is contained in the love of God and our neighbour; in that sum of religion, in which, as we are told by the Saviour of the world, the law and the prophets are comprised. The love of God will engage us to trust in his protection, to acquiesce in his dispensations, to keep his laws, to meditate on his perfection, and to declare our confidence and submission by profound and frequent adoration, to impress his glory on our minds by songs of praise, to inflame our gratitude by acts of thanksgiving, to strengthen our faith, and exalt our hope, by pious meditations, and to implore his protection of our imbecility, and his as-

sistance of our frailty, by humble supplication; and when we love God with the whole heart, the power of godliness will be shown by steadiness in temptation, by patience in affliction, by faith in the divine promises, by perpetual dread of sin, by continual aspirations after higher degrees of holiness, and contempt of the pains and pleasures of the world, when they obstruct the progress of religious excellence.

The power of godliness, as it is exerted in the love of our neighbour, appears in the exact and punctual discharge of all the relative and social duties. He whom this power actuates and directs, will regulate his conduct so as neither to do injury, nor willingly to give offence. He will neither be a tyrannical governor, nor a seditious subject; neither a cruel parent, nor a disobedient son; neither an oppressive master, nor an eye-servant. But he will not stop at negative goodness, nor rest in the mere forbearance of evil; he will search out occasions of beneficence, and extend his care to those who have no other claim to his attention than the great community of relation to the universal Father of mankind. To enumerate the various modes of charity which true godliness may suggest, as it is difficult, would be useless: they are as extensive as want, and as various as misery.

We must, however, remember, that where the form of godliness appears, we must not always suppose the power to be wanting, because its influence is not universal and complete; nor think every man to be avoided, in whom we discover either defective virtues or actual faults. The

power subsists in him who is contending with corruption, though he has not yet entirely subdued it. He who falleth seven times a day may yet, by the mercy of God, be numbered among the just ; the purest human virtue has much feculence. The highest flights of the soul soar not beyond the clouds and vapours of the earth ; the greatest attainments are very imperfect ; and he who is most advanced in excellence, was once in a lower state, and in that lower state was yet worthy of love and reverence. One instance of the power of godliness is, readiness to help the weak and comfort the fallen, to look with compassion upon the frail, to rekindle those whose ardour is cooling, and to recall those who, by inadvertency, or under the influence of strong temptation, have wandered from the right way ; and to favour all them who mean well, and wish to be better, though their meaning and their wishes have not yet fully reformed their lives.

There is, likewise, danger lest, in the pursuit of the power of godliness, too little regard be paid to the form, and lest the censure of hypocrisy be too hastily passed, and a life apparently regular and serious be considered as an artifice to conceal bad purposes and secret views.

That this opinion, which some are very willing to indulge, may not prevail so as to discountenance the profession of piety, we are to consider,

Thirdly, How far it is necessary to the Christian life, that the form and power of godliness should subsist together.

It may be with great reason affirmed, that though there may be the appearance of godliness without the reality, there can hardly be the reality without the appearance. Part of the duties of a Christian are necessarily public : we are to worship God in the congregation ; we are to make open profession of our hope and faith. One of the great duties of man, as a social being, is, to let his light shine before men, to instruct by the prevalence of his example, and, as far as his influence extends, to propagate goodness and enforce truth. No man is to boast of his own excellence, for this reason, among others ; the arrogance will make excellence less amiable, and less attractive of imitation. No man is to conceal the reverence of religion, or his zeal for truth and right ; because, by shrinking from the notice of mankind, he betrays diffidence of the cause which he wishes to maintain. He, whose piety begins and ends in zeal for opinions, and in elamour against those who differ from him, is certainly yet without the vital energy of religion ; but, if his opinions regulate his conduct, he may, with great justice, show his fervour, having already shown his sincerity. He that worships God in public, and offends him by secret vices, if he means to make the good part of his conduct balance the bad, is to be censured and instructed ; if he means to gain the applause of men, and to make outward sanctity an instrument of mischief, he is to be detested and avoided ; but he that really endeavours to obey God in secret, neglects part of his duty, if he omits the solemnities of public worship. The form of godliness, as it consists in the rites of religion, is

the instrument given us by God for the acquisition of the power; the means as well as the end are prescribed; nor can he expect the help of grace, or the divine approbation, who seeks them by any other method than that which infinite Wisdom has condescended to appoint.

SERMON XIV.

ISAIAH, CHAPTER XXVI. VERSE 3.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.

IN order to the explication of this text, or the enforcement of the precept implied in it, there seems to be no necessity, either of proving that all men are desirous of happiness, or that their desire, for the most part, fails of being gratified. Every man is conscious that he neither performs nor forbears any thing upon any other motive than the prospect either of an immediate gratification, or a distant reward; that whether he complies with temptation, or repels it, he is still influenced by the same general regard to his own felicity; but that, when he yields to the solicitation of his appetite, or the impulse of his passions, he is overborne by the prevalence of the object before him; and when he adheres to his duty, in opposition to his present interest, he is influenced by the hopes of future happiness.

That almost every man is disappointed in his search after happiness, is apparent, from the clamorous complaints which are always to be heard, from the restless discontent which is hourly to be observed, and from the incessant pursuit of new objects, which employ almost every moment of every man's life: for a desire of change is a suffi-

cient proof that we are dissatisfied with our present state, and evidently shows that we feel some pain which we desire to avoid, or miss some enjoyment which we wish to possess.

The true cause of this general disgust an unprejudiced and attentive survey of the world will not long fail of discovering : it will easily appear, that men fail to gain what they so much desire, because they seek it where it is not to be found ; because they suffer themselves to be dazzled by specious appearances, resign themselves up to the direction of their passions, and when one pursuit has failed of affording them that satisfaction which they expected from it, apply themselves with the same ardour to another equally unprofitable, and waste their lives in successive delusions, in idle schemes of imaginary enjoyment, in the chase of shadows which fleet before them, and in attempts to grasp a bubble, which, however it may attract the eye by the brightness of its colour, is neither solid nor lasting, but owes its beauty only to its distance, and is no sooner touched than it disappears.

As men differ in age or disposition, they are exposed to different delusions in this important inquiry. The young and the gay imagine happiness to consist in show, in merriment and noise, or in a constant succession of amusements, or in the gratification of their appetites, and the frequent repetition of sensual pleasures. Instead of founding happiness on the solid basis of reason and reflection, they raise an airy fabric of momentary satisfaction, which is perpetually decaying, and perpetually to be repaired. They please themselves,

not with thinking justly, but with avoiding to think at all; with a suspense of all the operations of their intellectual faculties, which defends them from remembrance of the past or anticipation of the future: they lull themselves in an enervate and cowardly dissipation, and, instead of being happy, are only indolent.

That this state is not a state of happiness, that it affords no real satisfaction to a reasonable mind, those who appear most engaged in it will, in their calmest moments, readily confess. Those among them on whom Providence has bestowed such abilities as are necessary to the discovery of truth, and the distinction of appearance from reality (for, among the negligent and voluptuous, men of this character are sometimes to be found), have always owned, that their felicity is like that of a deep sleep, from which they wake to care and sorrow; or of a pleasing dream, that affords them short gratifications, of which the day deprives them; and that their pleasures only differ from the phantoms of the night in this, that they leave behind them the pangs of guilt, with the vexation of disappointment.

It may be imagined, that reasonable beings must quickly discover how little such satisfactions are adapted to their nature, and how necessary it is to change their measures, in order to the attainment of that happiness which they desire; and, in effect, it is generally found that few, except the young and inexperienced, content themselves with sensual gratifications; and that men, as they advance in years, and improve their judgment by observation, always confess, by the alteration of their conduct, that mere voluptuousness is not sufficient to fill the

desires of the human mind. They, therefore, shake off the lethargy of sloth, forsake diversion and amusements, and engage in the pursuits of riches or of honours: they employ those hours, which were frequently suffered to pass away unnumbered and unheeded, with the most solicitous application, and the most vigilant attention: they are no longer negligent of all that passes about them, no more careless of the opinions of mankind, or unconcerned with regard to censure or applause: they become anxious, lest any opportunity should be lost of improving their fortunes, and lest they should give any occasion to reports which may injure their reputation and obstruct their advancement: they constrain their words, their actions, and their looks, to obtain popularity; because they consider popularity as necessary to grandeur, and grandeur as the foundation of happiness.

But a very short experience teaches, what might, indeed, have been without the trial discovered by reflection, that perfect peace, that peace which is so much desired, is not to be found in wealth and greatness. He that succeeds in his first attempts is animated to new designs; new designs produce new anxieties and new opposition; and, though the second attempt should be equally happy, it will be found, as soon as the transports of novelty have ceased, as soon as custom has made elevation familiar, that peace is yet to be sought, and that new measures must be taken for the attainment of that tranquillity, for which it is the nature of man to languish, and the want of which is ill supplied by hurry and confusion, by pomp and variety.

The same disposition which inclines any man

to raise himself to a superiority over others, will naturally excite the same desires of greater elevation, while he sees any superior to himself. There is, therefore, no hope that, by pursuing greatness, any man can be happy; or, at least, this happiness must be confined to one, because only one can be without a superior; and that one must surely feel his enjoyments very frequently disturbed, when he remembers by how many the station which he possesses is envied and coveted; when he reflects, how easily his possessions may be taken from him, perhaps by the same arts by which he attained them; how quickly the affections of the people may, by artful representations of his conduct, be alienated from him; or how easily he may be destroyed by violence, and what numbers ambition or revenge may invite to destroy him.

There is, at least, one consideration, which must imbitter the life of him, who places his happiness in his present state; a consideration that cannot be suppressed by any artful sophistries, which the appetites or the senses are always ready to suggest, and which it might be imagined not always possible to avoid in the most rapid whirl of pleasure, or the most incessant tumults of employment. As it is impossible for any man not to know, it may be well imagined difficult for him not to remember, that, however surrounded by his dependents, however caressed by his patrons, however applauded by his flatterers, or esteemed by his friends, he must one day die; that, though he should have reason to imagine himself secured from any sudden diminution of his wealth, or any violent precipitation from his rank or power, yet they must

soon be taken away, by a force not to be resisted or escaped. He cannot but sometimes think, when he surveys his acquisitions, or counts his followers, "that this night his soul may be required of him;" and that he had applauded himself for the attainment of that which he cannot hope to keep long, and which, if it could make him happy while he enjoys it, is yet of very little value, because the enjoyment must be very short.

The story of the great Eastern monarch, who, when he surveyed his innumerable army from an eminence, wept at the reflection that in less than a hundred years not one of all that multitude would remain, has been often mentioned; because the particular circumstances in which that remark occurred, naturally claim the thought and strike the imagination; but every man that places his happiness in external objects, may, every day, with equal propriety, make the same observations. Though he does not lead armies, or govern kingdoms, he may reflect, whenever he finds his heart swelling with any present advantage, that he must, in a very short time, lose what he so much esteems; that in a year, a month, a day, or an hour, he may be struck out from the book of life, and placed in a state where wealth or honour shall have no residence, and where all those distinctions shall be for ever obliterated, which now engross his thoughts, and exalt his pride.

This reflection will surely be sufficient to hinder that peace, which all terrestrial enjoyments can afford, from being perfect. It surely will soon disperse those meteors of happiness that glitter in the eyes only of the thoughtless and the supine,

and awaken him to a serious and rational inquiry, where real happiness is to be found; by what means man, whom the great Creator cannot be supposed to have formed without the power of obtaining happiness, may set himself free from the shackles of anxiety with which he is encumbered; may throw off the load of terror which oppresses him, and liberate himself from those horrors which the approach of death perpetually excites.

This he will immediately find only to be accomplished by securing to himself the protection of a Being mighty to save; a Being, whose assistance may be extended equally to all parts of his duration; who can equally defend him in the time of danger and of security; in the tumults of the day, and the privacy of the night; in the time of tribulation, and in a time frequently more fatal, the time of wealth; and in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. And when he has found the necessity of this sovereign Protector, and humbled himself with a due conviction of his own impotence, he may at last find the only comfort which this life can afford him, by remembering, that this great, this unbounded Being, has informed us of the terms on which perfect peace is to be obtained, and has promised it to those whose mind is stayed on him.

Since, therefore, the pursuit of perfect peace is the great, the necessary, the inevitable business of human life; since this peace is to be attained by trust in God, and by that only; since, without this, every state is miserable, and the voluptuous and the busy are equally disappointed; what can be more useful than seriously to inquire,

First, What is meant by this trust in God, to which perfect peace is promised? and,

Secondly, By what means this trust in God is to be attained?

First, therefore, let us consider what is meant by this trust in God, to which perfect peace is promised.

Trust, when it is used on common occasions, implies a kind of resignation to the honesty or abilities of another. Thus we trust a physician, when we obey his directions without knowing or asking the particular reasons for the methods which he enjoins: thus we trust a friend, when we commit our affairs to his management, without disturbing ourselves with any care concerning them: thus we trust a patron, when we serve him with diligence, without any other certainty of a reward than what our confidence in his generosity affords us. These instances may give us some idea of that trust which we ought to repose in God; but an idea, in the utmost degree, gross and inadequate. Our trust in God ought to differ from every other trust, as infinity differs from an atom: it ought to transcend every other degree of confidence, as its object is exalted above every degree of created excellence.

But, in our present state, it is impossible to practise this, or any other duty, in perfection. We cannot trust God as we ought, because we cannot know him as we ought. We know, however, that he is infinite in wisdom, in power, and in goodness; that therefore he designs the happiness of all his creatures; that he cannot but know the proper

means by which this end may be obtained; and that, in the use of these means, as he cannot be mistaken, because he is omniscient, so he cannot be defeated, because he is almighty.

We know, therefore, that those whom he shall protect cannot be in danger; that neither the malice of wicked men, nor of wicked angels, can really injure them; but that perseution and danger shall only harass them for a time, and death set them free from disappointment and from pain. He therefore that trusts in God will no longer be distracted in his search after happiness; for he will find it in a firm belief, that whatever evils are suffered to befall him will finally contribute to his felicity; and that, by "staying his mind upon the Lord, he will be kept in peace."

But God has promised this protection, not indiscriminately to all, but to those only who endeavour to obtain it, by complying with the conditions which he has prescribed: nor is the perfect peace, which the confidence of divine support confers, to be hoped for, but by those who have obtained a well-grounded trust in him; and, by the practice of his precepts, have stayed their minds upon him. It is, therefore, necessary to inquire,

Secondly, How this trust is to be attained.

That there is a fallacious and precipitate trust in God, a trust which, as it is not founded upon God's promises, will, in the end, be disappointed, we are informed by our Saviour himself: "Many will say unto me, in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonder-

ful works? and then I will profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Those who content themselves with believing and professing Christianity, without obeying its precepts; those who, while they call the great Author of our faith their Lord, their Master, and their God, and yet neglect his precepts and work iniquity, will be rejected by him at the last day, as those whom he has never known, those to whom his regard was never extended; and, notwithstanding the confidence with which they may claim his intercession, will not be distinguished by any favour from other sinners.

Trust in God, that trust to which perfect peace is promised, is to be obtained only by repentance, obedience, and supplication; not by nourishing in our own hearts a confused idea of the goodness of God, or a firm persuasion that we are in a state of grace; by which some have been deceived, as it may be feared, to their own destruction. We are not to imagine ourselves safe, only because we are not harassed with those anxieties about our future state with which others are tormented, but which are so far from being proofs of reprobation, that though they are often mistaken by those that languish under them, they are more frequently evidences of piety, and a sincere and fervent desire of pleasing God. We are not to imagine that God approves us because he does not afflict us; nor, on the other hand, to persuade ourselves too hastily that he afflicts us because he loves us. We are, without expecting any extraordinary effusions of light, to examine our actions by the great and un-

changeable rules of revelation and reason, “to do to others as we would that they should do to us,” and to love God with all our heart, and express that love by keeping his commandments.

He that hopes to find peace by trusting God, must obey him; and when he has at any time failed in his obedience, which amongst the best men will be very frequent, he must endeavour to reconcile God to him by repentance. He may then find another occasion of exercising his trust, by assuring himself, that “when the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and returns unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon.”

This constant and devout practice is both the effect and cause of confidence in God. He will naturally pour out his supplications to the Supreme Being, who trusts in him for assistance and protection; and he who, with proper fervour and humility, prostrates himself before God, will always rise with an increase of holy confidence. By meditating on his own weakness, he will hourly receive new conviction of the necessity of soliciting the favour of his Creator; and, by recollecting his promises, will confirm himself in the hope of obtaining what he desires; and if, to secure these promises, he steadily practises the duties on which they depend, he will soon find his mind stayed on God, and be kept in perfect peace, because he trusteth in him.

SERMON XV.

JOB, CHAP. XIV. VERSE 1.

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

THE position contained in this sentence neither acquires nor admits proof or illustration; being too evident to be denied, and too clear to be mistaken. That life is of short continuance, and is disquieted by many molestations, every man knows, and every man feels: and the complaint, attributed to Job, in the history that is supposed to be the oldest book of which mankind is in possession, has been continued, and will be continued, through all human generations, with endless repetitions.

But truth does not always operate in proportion to its reception. What has been always known, and very often said, as it impresses the mind with no new images, excites no attention, and is suffered to lie unheeded in the memory. Truth, possessed without the labour of investigation, like many of the general conveniences of life, loses its estimation by its easiness of access; nor is it always sufficiently remembered, that the most valuable things are those which are most plentifully bestowed.

To consider the shortness, or misery, of life, is not an employment to which the mind recurs for solace or diversion, or to which it is invited by any hope of immediate delight. It is one of those in-

tellectual medicines, of which the nauseous essence often obstructs the benefit, and which the fastidiousness of nature prompts us to refuse. But we are told by Solomon, that there is “a time not only to laugh,” but “a time to weep;” and that it is good sometimes “to enter into the house of mourning.” Many things which are not pleasant may be salutary; and among them is the just estimate of human life, which may be made by all with advantage, though by few, very few, with delight. As it is the business of a traveller to view the way before him, whatever dangers may threaten, or difficulties obstruct him, and however void may be the prospect of elegance or pleasure; it is our duty, in the pilgrimage of life, to proceed with our eyes open, and to see our state; not as hope or fancy may delineate it, but as it has been in reality appointed by Divine Providence. From errors, to which, after most diligent examination, the frailty of our understandings may sometimes expose us, we may reasonably hope, that He who knows whereof we are made will suffer no irremediable evil to follow; but it would be unreasonable to expect, that the same indulgence shall be extended to voluntary ignorance, or that we shall not suffer by those delusions to which we resign ourselves by idleness or choice.

Nothing but daily experience could make it credible that we should see the daily descent into the grave of those whom we love or fear, admire or detest; that we should see one generation passed, and another passing, see possessions daily changing their owners, and the world, at very short intervals, altering its appearance, and yet should want to be

reminded that life is short; or that we should, wherever we turn our eyes, find misfortune and distress, and have our ears daily filled with the lamentations of misery; that we should often feel pain and sickness, disappointments and privations; and yet, at every respiration of momentary ease, or gleam of fugitive and uncertain joy, be elated beyond the true sense of our condition, and need the voice of salutary admonition, to make us remember that life is miserable.

But, since the mind is always of itself shrinking from disagreeable images, it is sometimes necessary to recall them; and it may contribute to the repression of many unreasonable desires, and the prevention of many faults and follies, if we frequently and attentively consider,

First, "That man born of a woman is of few days." And,

Secondly, "That man born of a woman is full of trouble."

As this changeable and uncertain life is only the passage to an immutable state, and endless duration of happiness or misery, it ought never to be absent from our thoughts, That "man born of a woman is of few days."

The business of life is to work out our salvation; and the days are few in which provision must be made for eternity. We all stand upon the brink of the grave; of that state in which there is no repentance. He, whose life is extended to its utmost natural boundaries can live but a little while; and that he shall be one of those who are compara-

tively said to live long, no man can tell. Our days are not only few, but uncertain. The utmost that can be hoped is little; and of that little, the greater part is denied to the majority of mankind.

Our time is short, and our work is great: it is, therefore, with the kindest earnestness enjoined by the apostle, that we use all diligence to make our "calling and election sure." But to an impartial surveyor of the ways of men, will it appear that the apostle's summons has been heard or regarded? Let the most candid and charitable observer take cognizance of the general practice of the world; and what can be discovered but gay thoughtlessness or sordid industry? It seems that to secure their calling and election is the care of few. Of the greater part it may be said, that God is not in their thoughts. One forgets him in his business, another in his amusements; one in eager enjoyment of to-day, another in solicitous contrivance for to-morrow. Some die amidst the gratifications of luxury, and some in the tumults of contests undecided, and purposes uncompleted. Warnings are multiplied, but without notice. "Wisdom crieth in the streets," but is rarely heard.

Among those that live thus wholly occupied by present things, there are some in whom all sense of religion seems extinct or dormant; who acquiesce in their own modes of life, and never look forward into futurity; but gratify themselves within their own accustomed circle of amusements, or limit their thoughts by the attainment of their present pursuit; and, without suffering themselves to be interrupted by the unwelcome thoughts of death

and judgment, congratulate themselves on their prudence or felicity, and rest satisfied with what the world can afford them; not that they doubt, but forget, a future state; not that they disbelieve their own immortality, but that they never consider it.

To these men it is surely proper to represent the shortness of life, and to remind them that human acquisitions and enjoyments are of few days; and that, whatever value may be assigned them by perverted opinions, they certainly want durability; that the fabric of terrestrial happiness has no foundation that can long support it; that every hour, however enlivened by gaiety or dignified by splendour, is a part subducted from the sum of life; that age advances alike upon the negligent and anxious; and that every moment of delight makes delight the shorter.

If reason forbids us to fix our hearts upon things which we are not certain of retaining, we violate a prohibition still stronger, when we suffer ourselves to place our happiness in that which must certainly be lost; yet such is all that this world affords us. Pleasures and honours must quickly perish, because life itself must soon be at an end.

But if it be folly to delight in advantages of uncertain tenure and short continuance, how great is the folly of preferring them to permanent and perpetual good! The man whose whole attention converges to this world, even if we suppose all his attempts prosperous, and all his wishes granted, gains only empty pleasure, which he cannot keep, at the cost of eternal happiness, which, if now neglected, he can never gain.

Let such men, therefore, seriously reflect, that “man born of a woman is of few days, that he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.”

Others there are on whom the interests of life have very strong hold, who relax their thoughts by pleasure, or enchain them by attention to wealth or power, and yet feel, with forcible conviction, the importance of futurity; in whose breasts pious intentions are often budding, though they are quickly nipped by secular desires. Such men suffer frequent disturbance from the remonstrances of reason and the reproaches of conscience; and do not set reason or conscience at defiance, but endeavour to pacify them with assuasive promises of repentance and amendment. They know that their present state is dangerous, and, therefore, withdraw from it to a fancied futurity, in which, whatever is crooked is to be made straight; in which temptations are to be rejected and passions to be conquered; in which wisdom and piety are to regulate the day; in which every hour shall have its proper duty—the morning shall awake beneficence, and the evening still the soul in gratitude and devotion.

Purposes like these are often formed, and often forgotten. When remorse and solitude press hard upon the mind, they afford a temporary refuge, which, like other shelters from a storm, is forsaken when the calm returns. The design of amendment is never dismissed; but it rests in the bosom without effect. The time convenient for so great a change of conduct is not yet come. There are hinderances which another year will remove; there

are helps which some near event will supply. Day rises after day, and one year follows another, and produces nothing but resolutions without effect, and self-reproach without reformation. The time destined for a new life lapses in silence; another time is fixed, and another lapses; but the same train of delusion still continues. He that sees his danger, doubts not his power of escaping it; and though he has deceived himself a thousand times, loses little of his own confidence. The indignation excited by the past will, he thinks, secure him from any future failure. He retires to confirm his thoughts by meditation, and feels sentiments of piety powerful within him. He ventures again into the stream of life, and finds himself again carried away by the current.

That to such men the sense of their danger may not be useless; that they may no longer trifle with their own conviction; it is necessary to remind them that "man is of few days;" that the life allotted to human beings is short, and, while they stand still in idle suspense, is growing always shorter; that, as this little time is spent well or ill, their whole future existence will be happy or miserable; that he who begins the great work of his salvation early has employment adequate to all his powers, and that he who has delayed it can hope to accomplish it only by delaying it no longer.

To him who turns his thoughts late to the duties of religion, the time is not only shorter, but the work is greater. The more sin has prevailed, with the more difficulty is its dominion resisted. Habits are formed by repeated acts, and therefore old habits are always strongest. The mode of life to

which we have been accustomed, and which has entwined itself with all our thoughts and actions, is not quitted but with much difficulty. The want of those vanities, which have hitherto filled the day, is not easily supplied. Accustomed pleasures rush upon the imagination; the passions clamour for their usual gratifications; and sin, though resolutely shaken off, will struggle to regain its former hold.

To overcome all these difficulties, and overcome they must be, who can tell what time will be sufficient? To disburden the conscience, to reclaim the desires, to combat sensuality, and repress vanity, is not the work of an hour or of a day. Many conflicts must be endured, many falls recovered, and many temptations repelled. The arts of the enemy must be counteracted, and the deceitfulness of our own hearts detected, by steady and persevering vigilance.

But how much more dreadful does the danger of delay appear, when it is considered, that not only life is every day shorter, and the work of reformation every day greater, but that strength is every day less! It is not only comparatively lessened by the long continuance of bad habits; but, if the greater part of our time be past, it is absolutely less by natural decay. In the feebleness of declining life, resolution is apt to languish; and the pains, the sickness, and consequent infirmities of age, too frequently demand so much care for the body, that very little care is, or can be, taken for the soul.

One consideration more ought to be deeply impressed upon every sluggish and dilatory lingerer.

The penitential sense of sin, and the desire of a new life, when they arise in the mind, are to be received as monitions excited by our merciful Father, as calls which it is our duty to hear and our interest to follow; that to turn our thoughts away from them is a new sin; a sin which, often repeated, may at last be punished by dereliction. He that has been called often in vain, may be called no more; and when death comes upon him, he will recollect his broken resolves with unutterable anguish; will wish for time to do what he has hitherto neglected, and lament in vain that his days are few.

The motives to religious vigilance, and diligence in our duties, which are afforded by serious meditation on the shortness of life, will receive assistance from the view of its misery; and we are, therefore, to remember,

Secondly, That “man born of a woman is full of trouble.”

The immediate effect of the numerous calamities with which human nature is threatened or afflicted, is to direct our desires to a better state. When we know that we are on every side beset with dangers; that our condition admits many evils which cannot be remedied, but contains no good which cannot be taken from us; that pain lies in ambush behind pleasure, and misfortune behind success; that we have bodies subject to innumerable maladies, and minds liable to endless perturbations; that our knowledge often gives us pain, by presenting to our wishes such felicity as is beyond our reach; and our ignorance is such, that we often pursue with

eagerness what either we cannot attain, or what, if we could attain it, disappoints our hopes; that in the dead calm of solitude we are insufficient to our own contentment; and that, when weariness of ourselves impels us to society, we are often ill received; when we perceive that small offences may raise enemies, but that great benefits will not always gain us friends; when we find ourselves courted by interest, and forsaken by ingratitude; when those who love us fall daily into the grave, and we see ourselves considered as aliens and strangers by the rising generation; it seems that we must, by necessity, turn our thoughts to another life, where, to those that are well prepared for their departure, there will be no longer pain or sorrow.

Of the troubles incident to mankind, every one is best acquainted with his own share. The miseries of others may attract, but his own force his attention; and, as man is not afflicted but for good purposes, that attention, if well regulated, will contribute to purify his heart.

We are taught, in the history of Adam's fall, that trouble was the consequence of sin, and that misery came into the world by disobedience to the divine law. Sin and vexation are still so closely united, that he who traces his troubles to their source, will commonly find that his faults have produced them; and he is then to consider his sufferings as the mild admonitions of his heavenly Father, by which he is summoned to timely penitence. He is so far from having any reason to repine, that he may draw comfortable hopes of pardon and acceptance, and may say, with the highest reason, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

It is, however, possible that trouble may, sometimes, be the consequence of virtue. In times of persecution this has often happened. Confessors of the truth have been punished by exile, imprisonment, tortures, and death. The faithful have been driven from place to place, and those “have wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, of whom the world was not worthy.” Heb. xi. 37.

Of such violence Providence has now removed us from the danger; but it is still possible, that integrity may raise enemies, and that a resolute adherence to the right may not always be without danger. But evils of this kind bring their consolation with them; and their natural effect is, to raise the eye and thoughts to Him who certainly judges right; and to excite ardent desires of that state where innocence and happiness shall be united.

When we have leisure from our own cares to cast our eyes about us, and behold the whole creation groaning in misery, we must be careful that our judgment is not presumptuous, and that our charity is not regulated by external appearances. We are not to consider those on whom evil falls as the outcasts of Providence; for though temporal prosperity was promised to the Jews, as a reward of faithful adherence to the worship of God; yet, under the dispensation of the Gospel, we are now where taught that the good shall have any exemption from the common accidents of life, or that natural and civil evil shall not be equally shared by the righteous and the wicked.

The frequency of misfortunes and universality of misery may properly repress any tendency to discontent or murmur. We suffer only what is suf-

ferred by others, and often by those who are better than ourselves.

But the chief reason why we should send out our inquiries, to collect intelligence of misery, is, that we find opportunities of doing good. Many human troubles are such as God has given man the power of alleviating. The wants of poverty may evidently be removed by the kindness of those who have more than their own use requires. Of such beneficence the time in which we live does not want examples ; and surely that duty can never be neglected, to which so great rewards are so explicitly promised.

But the power of doing good is not confined to the wealthy. He that has nothing else to give, may often give advice. Wisdom likewise has benefits in its power. A wise man may reclaim the vicious, and instruct the ignorant ; may quiet the throbs of sorrow, or disentangle the perplexities of conscience. He may compose the resentful, encourage the timorous, and animate the hopeless : In the multifarious afflictions, with which every state of human life is acquainted, there is place for thousand offices of tenderness ; so that he, whose desire it is to do good, can never be long without an opportunity ; and every opportunity that Providence presents, let us seize with eagerness, and improve with diligence ; remembering that we have no time to lose, for “ Man that is born of a woman is of few days.”

SERMON XVI.

JOB, CHAP. I. VERSE 22.

In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

SUCH is the weakness of human nature, that every particular state or condition lies open to particular temptations. Different frames of constitution expose us to different passions, of equal danger to our virtue ; and different methods of life, whether we engage in them by choice or are forced upon them by necessity, have each of them their inlets to sin, and their avenues to perdition.

The two opposite states of prosperity and adversity equally require our vigilance and caution ; each of them is a state of conflict, in which nothing but unwearied resistance can preserve us from being overcome.

The vices of prosperity are well known, and generally observed. The haughtiness of high rank, the luxury of affluence, and the cruelty of power, every man remarks, and no man palliates ; so that they are the common subjects of invective.

But though compassion hinders men from being equally severe upon the faults of the unhappy and distressed, yet, as there always has been, and always will be, at least an equal number in this, as in the other state, it is proper that they likewise should be warned of the crimes to which the circumstances of their condition expose them, and furnished with

such reflections as may enable them to avoid them ; that one misery may not produce a greater, nor misfortune be the cause of wickedness.

There is no crime more incident to those whose life is imbittered with calamities, and whom afflictions have reduced to gloominess and melancholy, than that of repining at the determinations of Providence, or of "charging God foolishly." They are often tempted to unseemly inquiries into the reasons of his dispensations, and to expostulations about the justice of that sentence which condemns them to their present sufferings. They consider the lives of those whom they account happier than themselves, with an eye of malice and suspicion ; and if they find them no better than their own, think themselves almost justified in murmuring at their own state.

But how widely they err from their duty, by giving way to discontent, and allowing themselves to dispute the reasonableness of those laws by which the great Creator governs the world, will appear,

First, By considering the attributes of God.
And,

Secondly, By reflecting on the ignorance of man.

First, By considering the attributes of God.

Many of the errors of mankind, both in opinion and practice, seem to arise originally from mistaken notions of the Divine Being, or at least from want of attention to the nature of those attributes, which reason, as well as the holy Scriptures, teaches us to assign to him. A temporary forgetfulness has, for the time, the same effect as real ignorance, but has

this advantage, that it is much more easily remedied ; since it is much less difficult to recollect our own ideas than to obtain new ones. This is, I suppose, the state of every man amongst us, who is betrayed by his impatience under afflictions to murmur at Heaven. He knows, when he reflects calmly, that the world is neither eternal nor independent ; that we neither were produced, nor are preserved, by chance ; but that heaven and earth, and the whole system of things, were created by an infinite and perfect Being, who still continues to superintend and govern them. He knows that this great Being is infinitely wise and infinitely good ; so that the end which he proposes must necessarily be the final happiness of those beings that depend upon him, and the means, by which he promotes that end, must undoubtedly be the wisest and the best. All this he is sufficiently convinced of, when he is awakened to recollection ; but his conviction is overborne by the sudden gusts of passion, and his impatience hurries him to wicked exclamations, before he can recall to his mind those reasonings, which, if attended to, would stifle every rebellious thought, and change his distrust and discontent into confidence and tranquillity.

It very nearly concerns every man, since every man is exposed, by the nature of human things, to trouble and calamities, to provide against the days of adversity, by making such ideas familiar to his mind as may defend him against any temptations to the sin of “ charging God foolishly.”

It is frequently observed in common life, that some favourite notion or inclination, long indulged, takes such an entire possession of a man's mind,

and so engrosses his faculties, as to mingle thoughts perhaps he is not himself conscious of, with almost all his conceptions, and influence his whole behaviour. It will often operate on occasions, with which it could scarcely be imagined to have any connection, and will discover itself, however it may lie concealed, either in trifling incidents or important occurrences, when it is least expected or foreseen. It gives a particular direction to every sentiment and action, and carries a man forward, as by a kind of resistless impulse or insuperable destiny.

As this unbounded dominion of ideas, long entertained by the fancy, and naturalized to the mind, is a very strong argument against suffering ourselves to dwell too long upon pleasing dreams or delightful falsehoods, or admitting any inordinate passion to insinuate itself and grow domestic; so it is a reason, of equal force, to engage us in a frequent and intense meditation on those important and eternal rules, which are to regulate our conduct, and rectify our minds; that the power of habit may be added to that of truth, that the most useful ideas may be the most familiar, and that every action of our lives may be carried on under the superintendence of an overruling piety.

The man who has accustomed himself to consider that he is always in the presence of the Supreme Being; that every work of his hands is carried on, and every imagination of his heart formed, under the inspection of his Creator and his Judge, easily withstands those temptations which find a ready passage into a mind not guarded and secured by this awful sense of the divine presence. He is not enticed by ill examples, because the purity of God

always occurs to his imagination ; he is not betrayed to security by solitude, because he never considers himself as alone.

The two great attributes of our sovereign Creator; which seem most likely to influence our lives, and, by consequence, most necessarily to claim our attention, are his justice and his mercy. Each of these may suggest considerations very efficacious for the suppression of wicked and unreasonable murmurs.

The justice of God will not suffer him to afflict any man without cause, or without retribution. Whenever we suffer, therefore, we are certain, either that we have, by our wickedness, procured our own miseries, or that they are sent upon us as further trials of our virtue, in order to prepare us for greater degrees of happiness. Whether we suppose ourselves to suffer for the sake of punishment or probation, it is not easy to discover with what right we repine.

If our pains and labours be only preparatory to unbounded felicity; if we are "persecuted for righteousness' sake," or suffer by any consequences of a good life; we ought to "rejoice and be exceeding glad," and to glorify the goodness of God, who, by uniting us in our sufferings with saints and martyrs, will join us also in our reward.

But it is not uncharitable to believe of others, that this is not always the reason of their sufferings; and certainly no man ought to believe it of himself without a very severe and cautious examination, long continued and often repeated; for nothing is more dangerous than spiritual pride. That man that esteems himself a saint will be in danger of relaxing his circumspection, of stopping

in his progress of virtue, and, if once he stops, of falling back into those infirmities from which his imaginary exemption made him presumptuous and supine. Every man, therefore, when the hand of God is heavy upon him, must apply himself to an attentive and exact retrospection of his own life. He must inquire, if he has avoided all open enormities and scandalous degrees of guilt, whether he is not punished for some secret crime unknown to the world, and perhaps almost forgotten by himself; whether, in surveying himself, he does not overlook some favourite sin, some criminal indulgence; or whether he has not satisfied himself with increasing his devotions, instead of reforming his morals; or whether, from too much confidence in his morality, he has not been too negligent of his devotions; and whether he has not contented himself with an imperfect and partial satisfaction for some injury done to his neighbour, when an adequate and complete reparation was in his power.

To this inquiry he will be incited by remembering that God is just, that there is undoubtedly a reason for his misery, which will probably be found in his own corruption. He will, therefore, instead of murmuring at God, begin to examine himself; and when he has found the depravity of his own manners, it is more likely that he will admire the mercy, than complain of the severity, of his Judge.

We have, indeed, so little right to complain of punishment, when it does not exceed the measure of the offence, that to bear it patiently hardly deserves the name of virtue; but impatience under it is, in a high degree, foolish and criminal.

It is well known how partial every man is in his

own cause, and therefore it is necessary to meditate much upon the justice of God, lest we be tempted to think our punishments too great for our faults, and, in the midst of our anguish and distress, “charge God foolishly.”

But we shall receive yet further satisfaction from a frequent reflection on the *mercy* of God. We shall learn to consider him, not only as the Governor, but as the Father, of the universe; as a Being infinitely gracious, whose punishments are not inflicted to gratify any passion of anger or revenge, but to awaken us from the lethargy of sin, and to recall us from the paths of destruction.

Every man has observed, that the greatest part of those who enjoy the pleasures of this life, without interruption or restraint, are either entirely forgetful of any other state, or at least very little solicitous about it. Men are easily intoxicated with pleasure, dazzled with magnificence, or elated with power. The most pathetic or rational discourse upon eternity has seldom any lasting effect upon the gay, the young, the wealthy, and the prosperous. Even the Gospel itself was first received by the poor.

The reason of this is not because religion is best adapted to a gloomy and melancholy state of mind; for the truths of religion are attested by evidence, which must be yielded to as soon as it is considered, and confirmed by proofs, which nothing but inattention can resist. But to consider and weigh this evidence seriously and impartially, the mind must be abstracted, in some measure, from the objects that surround us; objects that strike us strongly, not because they are great, but because they are

near ; while the views of futurity affect us but faintly, not because they are unimportant, but because they are distant.

A constant conviction of the mercy of God, firmly implanted in our minds, will, upon the first attack of any calamity, easily induce us to reflect, that it is permitted by God to fall upon us, lest we should be too much enamoured of our present state, and neglect to extend our prospects into eternity.

Thus, by familiarizing to our minds the attributes of God, shall we, in a great measure, secure ourselves against any temptation to repine at his arrangements ; but shall, probably, still more strengthen our resolution, and confirm our piety, by reflecting,

Secondly, On the ignorance of man.

One general method of judging and determining upon the value or excellence of things, is by comparing one with another. Thus it is that we form a notion of wealth, greatness, or power. It is by comparing ourselves with others that we often make an estimate of our own happiness, and even sometimes of our virtue. They who repine at the ways of Providence, repine often, not because they are miserable, but because they are not so happy as others ; and imagine their afflictions dealt with a partial hand, not that they can conceive themselves free from guilt, but because they see, or think they see, others equally criminal that suffer less. Should they be supposed to judge rightly of themselves and others ; should it be conceived that, in rating their own excellences, they are not misled by their self-love, or that they are not hindered by envy from discerning the virtues of those whom they look

upon as rivals for happiness ; yet, unless they could prove that the mercies which they have received are below their merits, they have no reason to complain. He that has more than he deserves is not to murmur merely because he has less than another.

But, when we judge thus confidently of others, we deceive ourselves ; we admit conjectures for certainties, and chimeras for realities. To determine the degrees of virtue and wickedness in particular men, is the prerogative only of that Being that searches the secrets of the heart ; that knows what temptations each man has resisted, how far the means of grace have been afforded him, and how he has improved or neglected them ; that sees the force of every passion, knows the power of every prejudice, attends to every conflict of the mind, and marks all the struggles of imperfect virtue. He only who gave us our faculties and abilities, knows when we err by insurmountable ignorance, or when we deviate from the right by negligence or presumption : he only that knows every circumstance of life, and every motion of the mind, can tell how far the crimes or virtues of each man are to be punished or rewarded. No man can say that he is better than another, because no man can tell how far the other was enabled to resist temptation, or what incidents might concur to overthrow his virtue. Nor are we able to decide, with much greater certainty, upon the happiness of others. We see only the superficies of men, without knowing what passes within. Splendour, equipage, and luxury, are not always accompanied by happiness ; but are more frequently the wretched solaces of a mind distracted with perplexities, and harassed

with terrors. Men are often driven, by reflection and remorse, into the hurries of business or of pleasure, and fly from the terrifying suggestions of their own thoughts to banquets and to courts.

Prosperity and happiness are very different, though by those who undertake to judge of the state of others they are always confounded. It is possible to know that another is prosperous, that his revenues increase, that his dependents grow more numerous, that his schemes succeed, and his reputation advances; but we cannot tell how much all these promote his happiness, because we cannot judge how much they may engage his care or inflame his desires; how much he may fear his enemies or suspect his friends. We know not how much this seeming felicity may be impaired by his folly or his guilt; and therefore he that murmurs at the inequality of human happiness, or accuses Providence of partiality, forgets his own imperfections, and determines rashly where he cannot judge.

Let every one, then, whom God shall visit with affliction humble himself before him with steady confidence in his mercy, and unfeigned submission to his justice! Let him remember that his sins are the cause of his miseries, that his troubles are sent to awaken him to reflection, and that the evils of this life may be improved to his eternal advantage, if, instead of adding sin to sin, and "charging God foolishly," he applies himself seriously to the great work of self-examination and repentance.

For surely the frailty of this life, and the uncertainty of all human happiness, is proved by every view of the world about us, and every reflection

upon ourselves. Let not death arrest us in a state of mind unfit to stand the trial of eternal justice, or to obtain the privileges of infinite mercy! Let it not surprise us engaged in schemes of vanity or wishes of empty pleasure! Let death, which may seize us now, which will seize us at some time, equally terrible, find us, whenever it shall come, animated with the love of God, submissive to his eternal will, and diffused in universal charity and benevolence to our brethren.

Let this instant begin a new life, and every future minute improve it! Then, in exchange for riches, honours, or sensual delights, we may obtain the tranquillity of a good conscience, and that "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

SERMON XVII.

EXODUS, CHAPTER XX. VERSE 16.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

NOTHING is more common than for men to make partial and absurd distinctions between vices of equal enormity, and to observe some of the divine commands with great scrupulousness, while they violate others equally important, without any concern, or the least apparent consciousness of guilt.

That to do our duty in part is better than entirely to disregard it, cannot be denied; and he that avoids some crimes, from the fear of displeasing God, is, doubtless, far more innocent than he that has thrown off all restraint, has forgotten the distinctions of good and evil, and complies with every temptation. But it is a very dangerous mistake to conceive that any man, by obeying one law, acquires the liberty of breaking another; or that all sins, equally odious to God or hurtful to men, are not, with equal care, to be avoided.

We may frequently observe that men, who would abhor the thought of violating the property of another, by direct methods of oppression or rapine; men, on all common occasions, not only just, but kind and compassionate, willing to relieve the necessitous, and active in the protection of the injured, will, nevertheless, invade the characters of

others with defamation and calumny, and destroy a reputation without remorse.

If every day did not convince us how little either good or bad men are consistent with themselves, it might be wondered how men, who own their obligations to the practice of some duties, can overlook in themselves the omission of others equally important, and enjoined by the same authority; and that those who avoid *theft*, because they are forbidden *to steal*, do not equally abstain from *calumny*, since they are no less forbidden "to bear false witness against their neighbour;" a prohibition, of which I shall endeavour to explain the nature and enforce the necessity, by showing,

First, What are the different senses in which a man may be said "to bear false witness against his neighbour."

Secondly, The enormity of the sin of "bearing false witness."

Thirdly, What reflections may best enable us to avoid it.

The highest degree of guilt forbidden by this law of God is false testimony in a literal sense, or deliberate and solemn perjury in a court of justice, by which the life of an innocent man is taken away, the rightful owner stripped of his possessions, or an oppressor supported in his usurpations. This is a crime that includes robbery and murder, sublimed to the highest state of enormity, and heightened with the most atrocious aggravations. He that robs or murders by this method, not only does it, by the nature of the action, with calmness and pre-

meditation, but by making the name of God a sanction to his wickedness. Upon this it is unnecessary to dwell long, since men, arrived at this height of corruption, are scarcely to be reformed by argument or persuasion; and, indeed, seldom suffer themselves to be reasoned with or admonished. It may be, however, proper to observe, that he who is ever so remotely the cause of any wickedness, if he really designs, and willingly promotes it, is guilty of that action in the same, or nearly the same degree with the immediate perpetrator; and, therefore, he that suborns a false witness, or procures such an one to be suborned, whether in his own cause or in that of another, is guilty of the crime of perjury in its utmost extent.

Nor is that man only perjured who delivers for truth what he certainly knows to be false; but he, likewise, that asserts what he does not know to be true: for as an oath taken implies, in the opinion of the magistrate who administers it, a knowledge of the fact required to be proved, he that, by offering himself an evidence, declares himself acquainted with what he is ignorant of, is guilty of bearing false witness; since, though what he swears should happen to be true, it is not true that he knew it.

Such remarks as these seem, at the first view, very trifling, because they are obvious, and yet are made necessary by the conduct of mankind. Every man, almost, has had opportunities of observing with what gross and artless delusions men impose upon themselves; how readily they distinguish between actions, in the eye of justice and of reason, equally criminal; how often they hope to elude the vengeance of heaven, by substituting others to

perpetrate the villanies they contrive; how often they mock God by groundless excuses; and how often they voluntarily shut their eyes, to leap into destruction.

There is another sense in which a man may be said to "bear false witness against his neighbour," a lower degree of the crime forbidden in the text; a degree in which multitudes are guilty of it, or, rather, from which scarcely any are entirely free. He that attacks the reputation of another by calumny is, doubtless, according to the malignity of the report, chargeable with the breach of this commandment. Yet this is so universal a practice, that it is scarcely accounted criminal, or numbered among those sins which require repentance. Defamation is become one of the amusements of life, a cursory part of conversation and social entertainment. Men sport away the reputation of others, without the least reflection upon the injury which they are doing, and applaud the happiness of their own invention, if they can increase the mirth of a feast, or animate conviviality, by slander and detraction.

How it comes to pass that men do not perceive the absurdity of distinguishing in such a manner between themselves and others, as to conceive that conduct innocent in themselves, which, in others, they would make no difficulty of condemning, it is not easy to tell: yet it is apparent that every man is sufficiently sensible, when his own character is attacked, of the cruelty and injustice of calumny; and it is not less evident that those will animadvert, with all the wantonness of malice, upon the moral irregularities of others, whom the least

reflection upon their own lives kindles into fury, and exasperates to the utmost severities of revenge.

To invent a defamatory falsehood, to rack the invention for the sake of disguising it with circumstances of probability, and propagate it industriously, till it becomes popular, and takes root in the minds of men, is such a continued act of malice as nothing can palliate.

Nor will it be a sufficient vindication to allege that the report, though not wholly, yet, in part, is true, and that it was no unreasonable suspicion that suggested the rest: for, if suspicion be admitted for certainty, every man's happiness must be entirely in the power of those bad men, whose consciousness of guilt makes them easily judge ill of others, or whom a natural or habitual jealousy inclines to imagine frauds or villanies, where none are intended. And if small failings may be aggravated at the pleasure of the relator, who may not, however cautious, be made infamous and detestable? A calumny, in which falsehood is complicated with truth, and malice is assisted with probability, is more dangerous, but therefore less innocent, than unmixed forgery and groundless invectives.

Neither is the first author only of a calumny a "false witness against his neighbour," but he, likewise, that disseminates and promotes it; since, without his assistance, it would perish as soon as it is produced, would evaporate in the air without effect, and hurt none but him that uttered it. He that blows a fire for the destruction of a city is no less an incendiary than he that kindled it: and the

man that imagines he may, without a crime, circulate a calumny which he has received from another, may, with equal reason, conceive that, though it be murder to prepare poisons, it may be innocent to disperse them.

Many are the pleas and excuses with which those, who cannot deny this practice, endeavour to palliate it. They frequently assert, in their own justification, that they do not know the relation, which they hand about, to be false : but to those it may be justly replied, that, before they spread a report to the prejudice of others, they ought, if not to know that it is true, at least, to believe it upon some reasonable grounds : they ought not to assist a random whisper, or drive forward a flying tale : they ought not eagerly to catch at an opportunity of hurting, or add weight to a blow which may, perhaps, be undeserved.

It may happen, indeed, that a calumny may be supported by such testimony, and connected with such probabilities, as may deceive the circumspect and just ; and the reporter, in such cases, is by no means to be charged with bearing false witness ; because, to believe and disbelieve is not in our power ; for there is a certain degree of evidence to which a man cannot but yield : he, therefore, who is deceived himself, cannot be accused of deceiving others, and is only so far blameable, as he contributed to the dishonour or prejudice of another, by spreading his faults without any just occasion or lawful cause ; for to relate reproachful truths, only for the pleasure of depressing the reputation of our neighbour, is far from being innocent. The crime, indeed, doth not fall under

the head of calumny, but only differs from it in the falsehood, not in the malice.

There is another occasion made use of, by which, if this fault should escape from censure, many others might enjoy the same advantage. It is urged by some, that they do not adopt the tale till it is generally received, and only promote what they cannot hinder. But how must wickedness be controlled, if its prevalence be a reason for compliance? Is it equitable and just to coalesce with oppressors, because they are already too powerful for the injured to resist? Thus any man might vindicate rebellion, by affirming that he did not join with the rebels till they were already numerous enough to dethrone their prince. Thus a man may exempt himself from blame for betraying his trust and selling his country, by alleging that others had already sold it, and he only entered into the combination that he might share the reward of perfidy. But it requires few arguments to show the folly of such pleas as these. It is the duty of every man to regulate his conduct, not by the example of others, or by his own surmises, but by the invariable rules of equity and truth. Wickedness must be opposed by some, or virtue would be entirely driven out of the world: and who must oppose it in extremities, if, as it increases more, it be less criminal to yield without resistance? If this excuse will vindicate one man, it will vindicate another; and no man will be found who is obliged to maintain a post, from which others may fly without a crime, and to endeavour to reform the world, by which it is no reproach to be vitiated. If this reasoning were just, there might be a state of ge-

neral depravity, in which wickedness might lose its guilt, since every man might be led away by predominant corruption, and the universality of vice become its own defence.

In such a situation, indeed, there is a necessity for an uncommon firmness and resolution to persist in the right, without regard to ridicule on the one hand, or interest on the other. But this resolution must be summoned; we must call up all our strength, and awaken all our caution, and in defiance of iniquity, however warranted by fashion, or supported by power, maintain an unshaken integrity, and reproach the world by a good example, if we cannot amend it.

There is yet another way by which we may partake, in some measure, of the sin of "bearing false witness:" that he, who does not hinder the commission of a crime, involves himself in the guilt, cannot be denied; and that his guilt is yet more flagrant, if, instead of obstructing, he encourages it, is equally evident. He, therefore, that receives a calumny with applause, or listens to it with a silent approbation, must be, at least, chargeable with conniving at wrong, which will be found no trivial accusation, when we have considered,

Secondly, the enormity of the sin of "bearing false witness."

The malignity of an offence arises, either from the motives that prompted it, or the consequences produced by it.

If we examine the sin of calumny by this rule, we shall find both the motives and consequences of the worst kind: we shall find its causes and effects

concurring to distinguish it from common wickedness, and rank it with those crimes that pollute the earth and blacken human nature.

The most usual incitement to defamation is envy, or impatience of the merit or success of others; a malice raised not by any injury received, but merely by the sight of that happiness which we cannot attain. This is a passion, of all others most hurtful and contemptible; it is pride complicated with laziness; pride which inclines us to wish ourselves upon the level with others, and laziness which hinders us from pursuing our inclinations with vigour and assiduity. Nothing, then, remains, but that the envious man endeavour to stop those, by some artifice, whom he will not strive to overtake, and reduce his superiors to his own meanness, since he cannot rise to their elevation. To this end he examines their conduct with a resolution to condemn it; and, if he can find no remarkable defects, makes no scruple to aggravate smaller errors, till, by adding one vice to another, and detracting from their virtues by degrees, he has divested them of that reputation which obscured his own, and left them no qualities to be admitted or rewarded.

Calumnies are sometimes the offspring of resentment. When a man is opposed in a design which he cannot justify, and defeated in the prosecution of schemes of tyranny, extortion, or oppression, he seldom fails to revenge his overthrow by blackening that integrity which effected it. No rage is more fierce than that of a villain disappointed of those advantages which he has pursued by a long train of wickedness. He has forfeited the esteem

of mankind ; he has burdened his conscience, and hazarded his future happiness, to no purpose ; and has now nothing to hope but the satisfaction of involving those, who have broken his measures, in misfortunes and disgrace. By wretches like these it is no wonder if the vilest arts of detraction are practised without scruple, since both their resentment and their interest direct them to depress those whose influence and authority will be employed against them.

But what can be said of those who, without being impelled by any violence of passion, without having received any injury or provocation, and without any motives of interest, vilify the deserving and the worthless without distinction ; and, merely to gratify the levity of temper and incontinence of tongue, throw out aspersions equally dangerous with those of virulence and enmity ?

These always reckon themselves, and are commonly reckoned by those whose gaiety they promote, among the benevolent, the candid, and the humane ; men without gall and malignity, friends to good-humour, and lovers of a jest. But, upon a more serious estimation, will they not be, with far greater propriety, classed with the cruel and the selfish wretches that feel no anguish at sacrificing the happiness of mankind to the lowest views, to the poor ambition of excelling in scurrility ? To deserve the exalted character of humanity and good nature, a man must mean *well* ; it is not sufficient to mean *nothing*. He must act and think with generous views, not with a total disregard of all the consequences of his behaviour. Otherwise, with all his wit and all his laughter, what character can

he deserve, but that of “ the fool, who scatters fire-brands, arrows, and death, and says, Am I not in sport ?”

The consequences of this crime, whatever be the inducement to commit it, are equally pernicious. He that attacks the reputation of another invades the most valuable part of his property, and perhaps the only part which he can call his own. Calumny can take away what is out of the reach of tyranny and usurpation, and what may enable the sufferer to repair the injuries received from the hand of oppression. The persecutions of power may injure the fortune of a good man ; but those of calumny must complete his ruin.

Nothing can so much obstruct the progress of virtue, as the defamation of those that excel in it : for praise is one motive, even in the best minds, to superior and distinguishing degrees of goodness ; and, therefore, he that reduces all men to the same state of infamy, at least deprives them of one reward which is due to merit, and takes away one incitement to it. But the effect does not terminate here. Calumny destroys that influence, and power of example, which operates much more forcibly upon the minds of men than the solemnity of laws or the fear of punishment. Our natural and real power is very small ; and it is by the ascendant which he has gained, and the esteem in which he is held, that any man is able to govern others, to maintain order in society, or to perform any important service to mankind, to which the united endeavours of numbers are required. This ascendant, which, when conferred upon bad men by superiority of riches or hereditary honour, is frequently made

use of to corrupt and deprave the world, to justify debauchery, and shelter villainy, might be employed, if it were to be obtained only by desert, to the noblest purposes. It might discountenance vanity and folly ; it might make the fashion cooperate with the laws, and reform those upon whom reason and conviction have no force.

Calumny differs from most other injuries in this dreadful circumstance—he who commits it never can repair it. A false report may spread where a recantation never reaches ; and an accusation must certainly fly faster than a defence while the greater part of mankind are base and wicked. The effects of a false report cannot be determined or circumscribed. It may check a hero in his attempts for the promotion of the happiness of his country, or a saint in his endeavours for the propagation of truth.

Since, therefore, this sin is so destructive to mankind, and, by consequence, so detestable in the sight of God, it is necessary that we inquire,

Thirdly, What reflections may best enable us to avoid it.

The way to avoid effects is to avoid the causes. Whoever, therefore, would not be tempted “ to bear false witness,” must endeavour to suppress those passions which may incite him to it. Let the envious man consider, that, by detracting from the character of others, he in reality adds nothing to his own ; and the malicious man, that nothing is more inconsistent with every law of God, and institution of men, than implacability and revenge.

If men would spend more time in examining

their own lives, and inspecting their own characters, they would have less leisure, and less inclination, to remark with severity upon others. They would easily discover that it will not be for their advantage to exasperate their neighbour, and that a scandalous falsehood may be easily revenged by a reproachful truth.

It was determined by our blessed Saviour, in a case of open and uncontested guilt, that "he who was without fault" should "cast the first stone." This seems intended to teach us compassion even to the failings of bad men; and certainly that religion which extends so much indulgence to the bad, as to restrain us from the utmost rigour of punishment, cannot be doubted to require that the good should be exempted from calumny and reproach.

Let it be always remembered, that charity is the height of religious excellence; and that it is one of the characteristics of this virtue, that "it thinketh no ill of others!"

SERMON XVIII.

(Preached at Ashbourn.)

I CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER VI. VERSE 8.

Nay, you do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.

To subdue passion and regulate desire is the great task of man, as a moral agent ; a task, for which natural reason, however assisted and enforced by human laws, has been found insufficient, and which cannot be performed but by the help of religion.

The passions are divided by moralists into irascible and concupiscible ; the passions of resentment, and the passions of desire. The danger of the irascible passions, the mischiefs of anger, envy, and revenge, every man knows, by evil which he has felt, or evil which he has perpetrated. In their lower degrees, they produce brutality, outrage, contumely, and calumny ; and, when they are inflamed to the utmost, have too often risen to violence and bloodshed.

Of these passions the mischief is sometimes great, but not very frequent ; for we are taught to watch and oppose them from our earliest years. Their malignity is universally known, and as universally dreaded. The occasions that can raise them high do not often occur ; and when they

are raised, if there be no immediate opportunity of gratifying them, they yield to reason and persuasion, or subside by the soothing influence of time.

Of the irascible passions, the direct aim and present purpose, is the hurt or misery of another; of the concupiscible passions the proper motive is our own good. It is, therefore, no reproach to human nature that the concupiscible passions are more prevalent; for, as it is more natural, it is more just, to desire our own good than another's evil.

The desire of happiness is inseparable from a rational being, acquainted, by experience, with the various gradations of pain and pleasure. The knowledge of different degrees of happiness seems necessary to the excitement of desire, and the stimulation of activity. He that never felt pain would not fear it, nor use any precaution to prevent it. He who had been always equally at ease, would not know that his condition admitted any improvement, and therefore could have no end to pursue or purpose to prosecute. But man, in his present state, knowing of how much good he is capable, and to how many evils he is exposed, has his mind perpetually employed, in defence or in acquisition; in securing that which he has, or in attaining that which he believes he either does or shall want.

He that desires happiness must necessarily desire the means of happiness, must wish to appropriate, and accumulate, whatever may satisfy his desires. It is not sufficient to be without want: he will try to place himself beyond the fear of want; and endeavour to provide future gratifications for future

wishes, and lay up in store future provisions for future necessities.

It is by the effect of this care to provide against the evils, and to attain the blessings of life, that human society has its present form. For this purpose, professions are studied, and trades learned; dangers are encountered, and labour endured. For this reason every man educates his son in some useful art, which, by making him necessary to others, may oblige others to repay him what is necessary to himself. The general employment of mankind is to increase pleasure or remove the pressure of pain. These are the vital principles of action that fill ports with ships, shops with manufactures, and fields with husbandmen, that keep the statesman diligent in attendance, and the trader active in his business.

It is apparently the opinion of the civilized world that he who would be happy must be rich. In riches the goods of life are compendiously contained: they do not enlarge our own personal powers; but they enable us to employ the powers of others for our advantage. He who cannot make what he wants, will, however, easily procure it, if he can pay an artist. He who suffers any remediable inconvenience, needs not to suffer it long, if he can reward the labour of those who are able to remove it. Riches will make an ignorant man prudent by another's wisdom, and a weak man vigorous by another's strength: it can, therefore, be no wonder that riches are generally desired; and that almost every man is busy, through his whole life, in gaining or in keeping them for himself or his posterity.

As there is no desire so extensive, or so continual in its exertion, that possesses so many minds, or operates with such restless activity, there is none that deviates into greater irregularity, or more frequently corrupts the heart of man, than the wish to enlarge possessions and accumulate wealth.

In a discourse, intended for popular instruction, it would be of little utility to mention the ambition of kings, and display the cruelty of conquerors. To slaughter thousands in a day, to spread desolation over wide and fertile regions, and to carry rapine and destruction indiscriminately from one country to another, can be the crime only of those few who have sceptres in their hands; and, even among them, the wantonness of war is not very common in our days: but it is a sufficient evidence of the power of interest, that such acts should ever have been perpetrated; that there could ever be any man willing to augment his wealth or extend his power by slaughter and devastation, or able to persuade himself that he might purchase advantages, which he could enjoy only in imagination, at the expense of the lives of thousands of his subjects as well as his adversaries; of adversaries that never had injured or offended him, and of subjects whom it was his duty and his engagement to preserve and to protect.

Nor is it necessary to mention crimes which are commonly found amongst the lowest of mankind, the crimes of robbery and theft; for, though they are too common, their enormity is sufficiently understood by the laws which are enacted against them, and sufficiently menaced by the terrors which those laws hold out: they are so apparently de-

structive of social security, their consequences are so easily perceived, and their perniciousness so generally acknowledged, that to be suspected of them is to be infamous; and to be detected in the commission of them is to be exposed to punishment, and often to death.

But there is another mode of injuring the property of others, and of gaining unjust advantages, which, though not equally liable, at all times, to punishment, with theft and robbery, is, in its own nature, equally criminal, and, perhaps, more pernicious; therefore equally open to the censures of reason and religion. This species of guilt is distinguished by the appellation of *fraud*; a word which, when uttered, really excites a due degree of detestation, and which those who practise it, perhaps, disguise to their consciences by still softer terms.

But that such disguises may deceive the soul no longer; and that what is universally mischievous may be totally abhorred; I shall endeavour to show,

First, The nature of *fraud*, and the temptations to practise it.

Secondly, How much it is contrary to the rules of religion, and how much it obstructs the happiness of the world.

The nature of fraud, as distinct from other violations of right or property, seems to consist in this, that the man injured is induced to concur in the act by which the injury is done. Thus, to take away any thing valuable, without the owner's

knowledge, is a *theft*; to take it away against his consent, by threats or force, is a *robbery*; to borrow it, without intention of returning it, is a *fraud*, because the owner consents to the act by which it passed out of his own hands.

All *fraud*, therefore, supposes deceit, either in the affirmation of what is false, or the suppression of what is true; for no man willingly wrongs himself: he must be deceived, either by false appearances of the present, or by false promises of the future, by a display of fictitious advantages, or an artful concealment of certain inconveniences.

As it often happens that in committing a *fraud*, or persuading a man to injure himself, a considerable degree of skill and dexterity is required, the fraudulent are often considered, by themselves and others, as possessing uncommon powers of understanding; so that, though the act itself is blamed, the artifice is admired: conscience is overpowered by vanity, and the shame of guilt is lost in the pride of subtlety and acuteness.

It is to be feared that the science of over-reaching is too closely connected with lucrative commerce. There are classes of men who do little less than profess it, and who are scarcely ashamed when they are detected in imposture. Such men live, indeed, without reputation: they are considered as exercising dishonourable employments, but they are still tolerated; and, however they may be despised, are very rarely punished. The whole practice of buying and selling is, indeed, replete with temptation, which even a virtuous mind finds it difficult to resist. “A merchant shall hardly keep

himself from doing wrong, and an huckster shall not be freed from sin."*

"Many have sinned for a small matter; and he that seeketh for abundance will turn his eyes away. As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling."†

Such is the censure of the son of Sirach, which surely cannot be heard without alarm and terror.

It is, however, by no means to be admitted that all trade is necessarily fraudulent, or that all traders are dishonest. Every kind of life has its peculiar dangers, which the negligent incur, and the wise escape. The danger of a trader, like that of others, may be avoided by resolution, vigilance, and prayer, by a constant reference of his actions to his eternal interest, and by the help of God, diligently implored.

That the necessity of this vigilance may be more strongly recommended, it is fit that we consider,

Secondly, How much the practice of *fraud* is contrary to religion, and how much it obstructs the happiness of the world.

The great rule by which religion regulates all transactions between one man and another is, that every man "should do to others what he would expect that others," in the same case, "should do to him." This rule is violated in every act of fraud; for, however the "children of the world" may forgive or applaud themselves, when they *practise*

* Ecclesiasticus, xxvi. 29.

† xxvii. 1, 2.

fraud, they complain very loudly when they *suffer* it. They then can clearly discern its baseness and its mischief; and discover that nothing deserves praise but purity and goodness.

The crime of *fraud* has this aggravation, that it is generally an abuse of confidence. Robberies of violence are committed, commonly, upon those to whom the robber is unknown. The lurking thief takes indiscriminately what comes by chance within his reach. But deceit cannot be practised unless by some previous treaty and gradual advance, by which distrust is dissipated, and an opinion of candour and integrity excited. *Frاند*, therefore, necessarily disguises life with solicitude and suspicion. He that has been deceived, knows not afterwards whom he can trust, but grows timorous, reserved, afraid alike of enemies and friends; and loses, at least, part of that benevolence which is necessary to an amiable and virtuous character.

Fraud is the more to be suppressed by universal detestation, as its effects can scarcely be limited. A thief seldom takes away what can much impoverish the loser; but by *fraud* the opulent may at once be reduced to indigence, and the prosperous distressed: the effects of a long course of industry may be suddenly annihilated; the provision made for age may be withdrawn, and the inheritance of posterity intercepted.

For the particular application of this doctrine I am sorry that my native place should afford an opportunity: but since this society has called me to stand here before them, I hope no man will be offended, that I do my duty with fidelity and freedom. Truth requires that I warn you against a species

of fraud, sometimes found amongst you, and that of a very shameful and oppressive kind. When any man, whose contributions have had their due part in raising the fund for occasional relief, is reduced, by disease or hurt, to want the support which he has, perhaps, for many years supposed himself gradually accumulating against the day of distress, and for which he has denied himself many gratifications; at the time when he expects the beneficial effects of his prudence and parsimony; at that very time, every artifice is used to defeat his claim, and elude his right. He declares himself, perhaps, unable to work, by which nothing more can reasonably be meant, than that he is no longer capable of labour equal to his livelihood. This man is found employing the remains of his strength in some little office: for this, surely he deserves to be commended: but what has been the consequence? He has been considered as an impostor, who claims the benefit of the fund by counterfeited incapacity; and that feeble diligence, which, among reasonable and equitable men, gives him a title to esteem and pity, is misapplied, and misrepresented into a pretence for depriving him of his right; and this done by judges, who vainly imagine they shall be benefitted themselves by their own wicked determination.

It is always to be remembered that a demand of support from your common fund is not a petition for charity, but a claim to justice. The relief thus demanded is not a gift, but a debt; he that receives it has first purchased it: the denial of it, therefore, is a fraud and a robbery; and fraud so much the more atrocious and detestable, as by its

ture it must always be practised on the poor. When this succour is required, there is no place for favour or for resentment. What is due must be paid, because it is due: other considerations have here no weight. The amiable and the perverse, the good and the bad, have an equal right to the performance of their contract. He that has trusted the society with his money, cannot, without breach of faith, be denied that payment, which, when he paid his contribution, was solemnly stipulated.

It has been always observed by the wise, that it is every man's real interest to be honest; and he who practises *fraud*, to the injury of others, shows, at the same time, how *fraud* may be practised against himself. Those who have been forward in watching the steps of others, and have objected to payment when it was required, may live to be themselves watched, and excluded by a precedent, which their own fraudulence or malice has incited them to establish: they will then feel the folly of pickiness, and know the necessity of providing against the day of calamity by innocence and integrity; they will wish that they could claim the kindness of others as a recompense for kindness formerly exhibited by themselves.

Fraud is the more hurtful, because the wrong is often without redress. As he that is wronged by fraudulent practices must always concur in the act that injured him, it is not always easy to ascertain the exact limits of his agency, so as to know precisely how far he was deceived. This, at least, is seldom to be done without an inquiry and discussion, liable to many legal delays, and eludible by

many artifices. The redress, therefore, is often more pernicious than the injury; and while the robber lurks in secret, or flies for his life, the man of *fraud* holds up his head with confidence, enjoys the fruits of his iniquity with security, and bids defiance to detection and to punishment.

But this triumph, however he may escape human judicatures, must end with his life. The time will come, and will come quickly, when he that has defrauded his neighbour must stand before the Judge of all the earth; a Judge whom he cannot deceive, and before whom whatever he has taken wrongfully, without restitution and without repentance, will lie heavy on his soul.

“Let him, therefore, that has stolen, steal no more!” let him that has gained by *fraud*, repent and restore, and live and die in the exercise of honesty!

SERMON XIX.

2 CORINTHIANS, CHAP. IX. VERSE 7.

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity : for God loveth a cheerful giver.

THE frequency with which the duty of alms-giving has of late been recommended ; the perspicuity with which it has, on many occasions, been explained ; the force of argument by which its necessity has been proved to the reason, and the ardour of zeal with which it has been impressed upon the passions, make it reasonable to believe that it is now generally understood, and that very few of those who frequent the public worship, and attend with proper diligence to instruction, can receive much information, with regard to the excellence and importance of this virtue.

But as most of the crimes and miseries of our lives arise rather from negligence than ignorance ; as those obligations which are best known are sometimes, from the security to which the consciousness of our knowledge naturally betrays us, most easily forgotten, and as the impressions which are made upon the heart, however strong or durable they may at first appear, are easily weakened by time, and effaced by the perpetual succession of other objects which crowd the memory and distract the attention ; it is necessary that this great

duty should be frequently explained, that our ardour should be rekindled by new motion, our conviction awakened by new persuasions, and our minds enlightened by frequent repetitions of the instructions, which, if not recollected, must quickly lose their effect.

Every man who has either applied himself to the examination of his own conduct with care proportioned to the importance of the inquiry, or indulged himself in the more frequent employment of inspecting the behaviour of others, has had many opportunities of observing with how much difficulty the precepts of religion are long preserved in their full force ; how insensibly the ways of virtue are forsaken, and into what depravity those, who trust too much to their own strength, sometimes fall, by neglecting to press forward, and to confirm their resolution, by the same methods as they at first excited it. Innumerable temptations continually surround us, and innumerable obstructions oppose us. We are lulled with indolence, we are seduced by pleasure, we are perverted by bad examples, and we are betrayed by our own hearts. No sooner do we, in compliance either with the vanities or the business of life, relax our attention to the doctrines of piety, than we grow cold and indifferent, dilatory and negligent. When we are again called to our duty, we find our minds entangled with a thousand objections ; we are ready to plead every avocation, however trifling, as an exemption from the necessity of holy practices ; and, because we readily satisfy *ourselves* with our excuses, we are willing to imagine that we shall satisfy God, the God of infinite holiness and justice, who sees the most secret

motions of our minds, who penetrates through all our hypocrisy, and upon whom disinclination can be never imposed for inability.

With regard to the duty of charity, it is too common for men of avaricious and worldly dispositions to imagine that they may be saved without compliance with a command so little agreeable to their inclinations; and therefore, though perhaps they cannot always resist the force of argument, or repel conviction at its first assault, yet, as they do not willingly suffer their minds to dwell upon reasonings which they scarcely wish to be true, or renew, by frequent recollection, that sense of their duty which they have received, they quickly relapse into their former sordid insensibility, and, by indulging every consideration which can be applied to the justification of parsimony, harden their hearts, and withhold their hands: and, while they see the anguish of misery, and hear the cries of want, can pass by without pity and without regard; and, without even feeling any reproaches from their hearts, pray to God for that mercy which they have themselves denied to their fellow-beings.

One of the pleas which is alleged in justification of the neglect of charity, is inability to practise it; an excuse, when real, to which no objection can be made; for it cannot be expected that any man should give to another what he must himself want in the same degree. But this excuse is too frequently offered by those who are poor only in their own opinion, who have habituated themselves to look on those that are above, rather than on those that are below them, and cannot account themselves rich while they see any richer; men who measure

their revenues, not by the wants of nature, but by the demands of vanity ; and who have nothing to give, only because they will not diminish any particle of their splendour, nor reduce the pomp of their equipage ; who, while their tables are heaped with delicacies, and their houses crowded with festal assemblies, suffer the poor to languish in the streets in miseries and in want, complain that their fortunes are not equal to the generosity of their minds, and applaud their own inclinations to charity and mercy ; inclinations which are never exerted in beneficence, because they cannot spare any thing from their appetites and their pride.

Others there are who frequently delight to dwell upon the excellency of charity, and profess themselves ready to comply with its precepts whenever proper objects shall be proposed, and an opportunity of proper application shall be found ; but they pretend they are so *well* informed with regard to the perversion of charity, and discover so many ill effects of indistinguishing and careless liberality, that they are not easily satisfied with the occasions which are offered them. They are sometimes afraid of encouraging idleness, and sometimes of countenancing imposture, and so readily find objections to every method of charity that can be mentioned to them, that their good inclinations are of very little advantage to the rest of mankind ; but, however, they congratulate themselves upon their merit, and still applaud that generosity by which calamity was never softened, and by which want never was relieved.

But that all these imaginary pleas may be once more confuted, that the opportunity of charity,

which Providence has this day put into our hands, may not be neglected, and that our alms may be given in such a manner as may obtain acceptance with the great Judge of all the earth, who has promised to show mercy to the merciful, I shall endeavour to lay before you,

First, The importance and necessity of the practice of charity.

Secondly, The disposition of mind which is necessary to make our alms acceptable to God.

Thirdly, The reasonableness of laying hold on the present opportunity for the exercise of our charity.

And, First, I shall endeavour to show the importance and necessity of the practice of charity. The importance and necessity of charity is so evident, that as it might be hoped that no proof could be necessary, so it is difficult to produce any arguments which do not occur of themselves to every reasonable and attentive mind. For whither can we turn our thoughts, or direct our eyes, where we shall not find some motive to the exercise of charity?

If we look up to heaven, which we have been taught to consider as the particular residence of the Supreme Being, we find there our Creator, our Preserver, and our Judge; our Creator, whose infinite power gave us our existence, and who has taught us, by that gift, that bounty is agreeable to his nature; our Preserver, of whose assistance and protection we are every day and every moment in need, and whose favour we can hope to secure only by imitating his goodness, and endeavouring the

assistance and protection of each other; and our Judge, who has already declared that the merciful shall obtain mercy, and that, in the awful day in which every man shall be recompensed according to his works, he that *soweth* sparingly shall *reap* also sparingly.

If we cast our eyes over the earth, and extend our observations through the system of human beings, what shall we find but scenes of misery, and innumerable varieties of calamity and distress; the pains of sickness, the wounds of casualty, the grippings of hunger, and the cold of nakedness; wretches wandering without an habitation, exposed to the contempt of the proud, and the insults of the cruel, goaded forward by the stings of poverty to dishonest acts, which perhaps relieve their present misery only to draw some more dreadful distress upon them? And what are we taught by all these different states of unhappiness? what, but the necessity of that virtue by which they are relieved, by which the orphan may be supplied with a father, and the widow with a defender; by which nakedness may be clothed, and sickness set free from adventitious pains; the stranger solaced in his wanderings, and the hungry restored to vigour and to ease?

If we turn from these melancholy prospects, and cast our eyes upon ourselves, what shall we find but a precarious and frail being, surrounded on every side with danger, and besieged with miseries and with wants? miseries, which we cannot avert by our own power, and wants which our own abilities cannot supply. We perceive ourselves wholly unable to stand alone, and compelled to solicit every

moment the assistance of our fellow-creatures; whom perhaps our Maker enables us at present to repay by mutual kindness, but whom we know not how soon we may be necessitated to implore, without the capacity of returning their beneficence.

This reflection surely ought immediately to convince us of the necessity of charity. Prudence, even without religion, ought to admonish every one to assist the helpless and relieve the wretched, that, when the day of distress shall come upon him, he may confidently ask that assistance which he himself, in his prosperity, never did deny.

As it has pleased God to place us in a state in which we are surrounded with innumerable temptations; so it has pleased him, on many occasions, to afford us temporal incitements to virtue, as a counterbalance to the allurements of sin; and to set before us rewards which may be obtained, and punishments which may be suffered, before the final determination of our future state. As charity is one of our most important duties, we are pressed to its practice by every principle of secular as well as religious wisdom; and no man can suffer himself to be distinguished for hardness of heart, without danger of feeling the consequence of his wickedness in his present state; because no man can secure to himself the continuance of riches or of power, nor can prove that he shall not himself *want* the assistance which he now *denies*, and perhaps be compelled to implore it from those whose petition he now rejects, and whose miseries he now insults. Such is the instability of human affairs, and so frequently does God assert his government

of the world, by exalting the low, and depressing the powerful.

If we endeavour to consult higher wisdom than our own, with relation to this duty, and examine the opinions of the rest of mankind; it will be found that all the nations of the earth, however they may differ with regard to every other tenet, yet agree in the celebration of benevolence, as the most amiable disposition of the heart, and the foundation of all happiness. We shall find that, in every place, men are loved and honoured in proportion to the gifts which they have conferred upon mankind; and that nothing but charity can recommend *one* man to the affection of *another*.

But if we appeal, as is undoubtedly reasonable and just, from human wisdom to divine, and search the holy Scriptures, to settle our notions of the importance of this duty, we shall need no further incitements to its practice; for every part of that sacred volume is filled with *precepts* that direct, or *examples* that inculcate it.

The practice of hospitality among the patriarchs; the confidence of Job, amidst his afflictions, arising from the remembrance of his former charity; the precepts of the prophets, and the conduct of the holy men of all times, concur to enforce the duty of attending to the cries of misery, and endeavouring to relieve the calamities of life.

But surely all further proof will be superseded, when the declaration of our blessed Redeemer is remembered, who has condescended to inform us that those who have shown mercy shall find mercy from him; that the practice of charity will be the

great test by which we shall be judged ; and that those, and those only, who have given food to the hungry, and raiment to the naked, shall, at the final doom, be numbered by the Son of God amongst the blessed of his Father.

There can nothing more be added to show the necessity of the practice of charity ; for what can be expected to move him by whom everlasting felicity is disregarded, and who hears, without emotion, never-ending miseries threatened by Omnipotence ? It therefore now remains that we inquire,

Secondly, How we may practise this duty in a manner pleasing to him who commanded it ; or what disposition of mind is necessary to make our alms acceptable to God.

Our Saviour, as he has informed us of the necessity of charity, has not omitted to teach us likewise how our acts of charity are to be performed : and from his own precepts, and those of his apostles, may be learned all the cautions necessary to obviate the deceit of our own hearts, and to preserve us from falling into follies dangerous to our souls, while we imagine ourselves advancing in the favour of God.

We are commanded by Jesus Christ, when we give our alms, to divest ourselves of pride, vain-glory, and desire of applause : we are forbidden to give that we may be seen of men, and instructed so to conduct our charity that it may be known to our Father which seeth in secret. By this precept it is not to be understood that we are forbidden to give alms in public, or where we may be seen of men ;

for our Saviour has also commanded, that our "light should so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." The meaning therefore of this text is, not that we should forbear to give alms in the sight of men, but that we should not suffer the presence of men to act as the motive to our charity, nor regard their praise as any object to our wishes; a precept surely reasonable; for how can that act be virtuous, which depends not upon our *own* choice, but upon that of *others*, and which we should not have performed, if we had not expected that they would have applauded it?

Of the same kind, though somewhat different in its immediate and literal acceptation, is the instruction contained in the text, in which we are taught by St. Paul, that every man ought to give according to the purpose of his own heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity; by which it is commanded, that we should, as our Saviour had already taught us, lay aside, in the distribution of our alms, all regard to human authority; that we should give according to the purpose of our own hearts, without respect to solicitation or influence; that we should give, because God has commanded, and give cheerfully, as a proof of ready and uncompelled obedience; obedience uncompelled by any other motive than a due sense of our dependence upon the universal Lord, and the reasonableness of observing the law of him by whom we were created.

There are likewise other rules to be observed in the practice of charity, which may be gathered, at least consequentially, from the holy Scriptures; and which the common prudence of mankind at the

same time evidently prescribes. It is necessary that, in bestowing our alms, we should endeavour to promote the service of God, and the general happiness of society, and therefore we ought not to give them without inquiry into the ends for which they are desired; we ought not to suffer our beneficence to be made instrumental to the encouragement of vice or the support of idleness; because what is thus squandered may be wanted by others, who would use our kindness to better purposes, and who, without our assistance, would perhaps perish.

Another precept, too often neglected, which yet a generous and elevated mind would naturally think highly necessary to be observed, is, that alms should be given in such a manner as may be most pleasing to the person who receives them; that our charity should not be accompanied with insults, nor followed by reproaches; that we should, whenever it is possible, spare the wretched the unnecessary, the mortifying pain of recounting their calamities, and representing their distress; and when we have relieved them we should never upbraid them with our kindness, nor recall their afflictions to their minds by cruel and unseasonable admonitions to gratitude or industry. He only confers favours generously, who appears, when they are once conferred, to remember them no more.

Poverty is in itself sufficiently afflictive, and to most minds the pain of wanting assistance is scarcely balanced by the pleasure of receiving it. The end of charity is to mitigate calamities; and he has little title to the reward of mercy, who afflicts with one hand, while he succours with the other. But

this fault, like many others, arises from pride, and from the desire of temporal rewards. Men either forget the common nature of humanity, and therefore reproach others with those misfortunes to which they are themselves equally subject ; or they expect from the gratitude or applause of those whom they benefit, that reward which they are commanded to hope only from their Father which is in heaven.

Such are the rules of charity, and such the cautions required to make our alms pleasing to him in whose name they ought to be given ; and that they may be *now* given not “ grudgingly” or of “ necessity,” but with that cheerfulness which the apostle recommends as necessary to draw down the love of God upon those by whom they are bestowed, let us consider,

Thirdly, The reasonableness of laying hold on the present opportunity for the exercise of our charity.

It is just that we should consider every opportunity of performing a good action as the gift of God, one of the chief gifts which God bestows upon man in his present state, and endeavour to improve the blessing, that it may not be withdrawn from us as a talent unemployed ; for it is not certain that he, who neglects this call to his duty, will be permitted to live till he hears another. It is likewise reasonable to seize this opportunity, because perhaps none can be afforded of more useful or beneficial charity, none in which all the various purposes of charity are more compendiously united.

It cannot be said, that, by this charity, idleness is encouraged; for those who are to be benefitted by it are at present incapable of labour, but hereafter designed for it. Nor can it be said that vice is countenanced by it, for many of them cannot yet be vicious. Those who now give cannot bestow their alms for the pleasure of hearing their charity acknowledged, for they who shall receive it will not know their benefactors.

The immediate effect of alms given on this occasion is not only food to the hungry, and clothes to the naked, and an habitation to the destitute, but, what is of more *lasting* advantage, *instruction* to the *ignorant*.

He that *supports* an infant enables him to live *here*; but he that *educates* him assists him in his passage to a happier state, and prevents that wickedness which is, if not the *necessary*, yet the *frequent consequence* of unenlightened infancy and vagrant poverty.

Nor does this charity terminate in the persons upon whom it is conferred, but extends its influence through the whole state, which has very frequently experienced how much is to be dreaded from men bred up without principles and without employment. He who *begs* in the street in his *infancy*, learns only how to *rob* there in his *manhood*; and it is certainly very apparent with how much less difficulty evils are prevented than remedied.

But though we should suppose, what reason and experience sufficiently disprove, that poverty and ignorance were calamities to those only on whom they fall, yet surely the sense of their misery might be sufficient to awaken us to compassion: for who

can hear the cries of a naked infant without remembering that he was himself once equally naked, equally helpless? Who can see the disorders of the ignorant, without remembering that he was born as ignorant as they? And who can forbear to reflect, that he ought to bestow on others those benefits which he received himself? Who, that shall see piety and wisdom promoted by his beneficence, can wish that what he gave for such uses had been employ'd in any other manner? As the apostle exhorts to hospitality by observing that some have entertained *angels* unawares, let us animate ourselves to this charity by the hopes of educating *saints*. Let us endeavour to reclaim vice, and to improve innocence to holiness; and remember that the day is not far distant in which our Saviour has promised to consider our gifts to these little ones as given to himself; and that "they who have turned many to righteousness shall shine forth as the sun, for ever and ever."

SERMON XX.

2 PETER, CHAP. III. VERSE 3.

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.

A VERY little acquaintance with human nature will inform us, that there are few men who can patiently bear the imputation of being in the wrong; and that there is no action, how unreasonable or wicked soever it be, which those, who are guilty of it, will not attempt to vindicate, though, perhaps, by such a defence as aggravates the crime.

It is, indeed, common for men to conceal their faults, and gratify their passions in secret; and, especially when they are first initiated in vice, to make use rather of artifice and dissimulation than audaciousness and effrontery. But the arts of hypocrisy are in time exhausted, and some unhappy circumstance defeats those measures which they had laid for preventing a discovery. They are, at length, suspected, and, by that curiosity which suspicion always excites, closely pursued and openly detected. It is then too late to think of deceiving mankind by false appearances, nor does any thing remain but to avow boldly what can be no longer denied. Impudence is called in to the assistance of immorality; and the censures, which cannot be escaped must be openly defied. Wickedness is in itself timorous, and naturally skulks in

coverts and in darkness, but grows furious by despair, and, when it can fly no further, turns upon the pursuer.

Such is the state of a man abandoned to the indulgence of vicious inclinations. He justifies one crime by another; invents wicked principles to support wicked practices; endeavours rather to corrupt others than own himself corrupted; and, to avoid that shame which a confession of his crimes would bring upon him, calls "evil good, and good evil, puts darkness for light, and light for darkness." He endeavours to trample upon those laws which he is known not to observe; to scoff at those truths which, if admitted, have an evident tendency to convict his whole behaviour of folly and absurdity; and, from having long neglected to obey God, rises at length into rebellion against him.

That no man ever became abandoned at once, is an old and common observation, which, like other assertions founded on experience, receives new confirmation by length of time. A man ventures upon wickedness as upon waters with which he is unacquainted. He looks upon them with horror, and shudders at the thought of quitting the shore, and committing his life to the inconstancy of the weather; but, by degrees, the scene grows familiar, his aversion abates, and is succeeded by curiosity. He launches out with fear and caution, always anxious and apprehensive, lest his vessel should be dashed against a rock, sucked in by a quicksand, or hurried by the currents beyond sight of shore: but his fears are daily lessening, and the deep becomes less formidable. In time he loses all sense of dan-

ger, ventures out with full security, and roves without inclination to return, till he is driven into the boundless ocean, tossed about by the tempests, and at last swallowed by the waves.

Most men have, or once had, an esteem and reverence for virtue, and a contempt and abhorrence of vice; of which, whether they were impressed by nature, implanted by education, or deduced and settled by reason, it is at present of very little importance to inquire. Such these notions are, however they were originally received, as reason cannot but adopt and strengthen, and every man will freely confess that reason ought to be the rule of his conduct. Whoever, therefore, recedes, in his practice, from rules of which he allows the obligation, and suffers his passions to prevail over his opinions, feels at first a secret reluctance, is conscious of some sort of violence done to his intellectual powers: and though he will not deny himself that pleasure which is present before him, or that single gratification of his passions, he determines, or thinks he determines, that he will yield to no future temptation, that he will hereafter reject all the solicitation of his appetites, and live in such a manner as he should applaud in others, and as his own conscience should approve in himself.

Perhaps every man may recollect that this was the temper of his mind when he first permitted himself to deviate from the known paths of his duty; and that he never forsook them in the early part of his life, without a design to return to them, and persevere in them; and that, when he was tempted another time, he complied always with a

tacit intention to add but this one more to his offences, and to spend the rest of his life in penitence and obedience. Perhaps there are very many among the most profligate, who frequently still their consciences, and animate their hopes, with views of a reformation to be sincerely entered upon in some distant period of their lives, who propose to dedicate at least their last years to piety, and at some moments give way to wishes, that they may some time taste the satisfaction of a good life, and "die the death of the righteous."

But these, however given up to their desires and passions, however ignorant of their own weakness, and presumptuously confident of their natural powers, have not yet arrived at the summit of impiety, till they have learned, not only to neglect, but to insult religion; not only to be vicious, but to scoff at virtue.

This seems to be the last effect of a long continued habit of sin, the strongest evidence of a mind corrupted almost beyond hope of a recovery. Wickedness in this state seems to have extended its power from the passions to the understanding. Not only the desire of doing well is extinguished, but the discernment of good and evil obliterated and destroyed. Such is the infatuation produced by a long course of obstinate guilt.

Not only our speculations influence our practice, but our practice reciprocally influences our speculations. We not only do what we approve, but there is danger lest in time we come to approve what we do, though for no other reason but that we do it. A man is always desirous of being at peace with himself; and when he cannot reconcile his passions

to his conscience, he will attempt to reconcile his conscience to his passions; he will find reason for doing what he is resolved to do, and, rather than not "walk after his own lusts," will scoff at religion.

These scoffers may be divided into two distinct classes, to be addressed in a very different manner; those whom a constant prosecution of their lusts has deluded into a real disbelief of religion, or diverted from a serious examination of it; and those who are convinced of the truth of revelation, but affect to condemn and ridicule it from motives of interest or vanity.

I shall endeavour therefore to evince,

First, the folly of scoffing at religion in those who doubt the truth of it. And,

Secondly, The wickedness of this practice in those who believe it.

First, I shall endeavour to evince the folly of scoffing at religion in those who doubt the truth of it.

Those who in reality disbelieve, or doubt of religion, however negligent they may be in their inquiries after truth, generally profess the highest reverence for it, the sincerest desire to discover it, and the strongest resolutions to adhere to it. They will frequently assert, and with good reason, that every man is valuable in proportion to his love of truth; that man enjoys the power of reason for this great end, that he may distinguish truth from falsehood; that not to search for it is the most criminal laziness; and not to declare it, in opposi-

tion to the frowns of power or the prejudices of ignorance, the most despicable cowardice.

When they declaim on this darling subject, they seldom fail to take the opportunity of throwing out keen invectives against bigotry; bigotry, that voluntary blindness, that slavish submission to the notions of others, which shackles the power of the soul, and retards the progress of reason; that cloud which intercepts our views, and throws a shade over the light of truth.

Such is the discourse of these men; and who that hears it would not expect from them the most disinterested impartiality, the most unwearied assiduity, and the most candid and sober attention to any thing proposed as an argument upon a subject worthy of their study? Who would not imagine that they made it the grand business of their lives to carry the art of reasoning to its greatest height, to enlighten the understanding of the ignorant, by plain instructions, enforced with solid arguments, and to establish every important truth upon the most certain and unshaken principles?

There seems to be nothing more inconsistent with so philosophical a character than careless vivacity and airy levity. The talents which qualify a man for a disputant and a buffoon seem very different; and an unprejudiced person would be inclined to form contrary ideas of an argument and a jest.

Study has been hitherto thought necessary to knowledge, and study cannot well be successfully prosecuted without solitude and leisure. It might, therefore, be conceived, that this exalted sect is above the low employments and empty amusements

of vulgar minds; that they avoid every thing which may interrupt their meditations or perplex their ideas; and that, therefore, whoever stands in need of their instructions, must seek them in privacies and retirements, in deserts or in cells.

But these men have discovered, it seems, a more compendious way to knowledge. They decide the most momentous questions amidst the jollity of feasts and the excesses of riot. They have found that an adversary is more easily silenced than confuted. They insult, instead of vanquishing, their antagonists; and decline the battle to hasten to the triumph.

It is an established maxim among them, that he who ridicules an opinion confutes it. For this reason they make no scruple of violating every rule of decency, and treating with the utmost contempt whatever is accounted venerable or sacred.

For this conduct they admire themselves, and go on applauding their own abilities, celebrating the victories they gain over their grave opponents, and loudly boasting their superiority to the advocates of religion.

As humility is a very necessary qualification for an examiner into religion, it may not be improper to depress the arrogance of these haughty champions, by showing with how little justice they lay claim to victory, and how much less they deserve to be applauded than despised.

There are two circumstances which, either single or united, make any attainments estimable among men. The first is the usefulness of it to society: the other is the capacity or application necessary for acquiring it.

If we consider this art of scoffing with regard to either of these, we shall not find great reason to envy or admire it. It requires no depth of knowledge or intenseness of thought. Contracted notions, and superficial views, are sufficient for a man who is ambitious only of being the author of a jest. That man may laugh who cannot reason; and he that cannot comprehend a demonstration, may turn the terms to ridicule.

This method of controversy is indeed the general refuge of those whose idleness or incapacity disable them from producing any thing solid or convincing. They who are certain of being confuted and exposed in a sober dispute, imagine that by returning scurrility for reason, and by laughing most loudly when they have least to say, they shall shelter their ignorance from detection, and supply with impudence what they want in knowledge.

Nor will the possessors of this boasted talent of ridicule appear more to deserve respect on account of their usefulness to mankind. These gay sallies of imagination, when confined to proper subjects, and restrained within the bounds of decency, are of no further use to mankind than to divert, and can have no higher place in our esteem than any other art that terminates in mere amusement.

But when men treat serious matters ludicrously; when they study, not for truth, but for a jest; when they unite the most awful and most trifling ideas, only to tickle the imagination with the surprise of novelty, they no longer have the poor merit of diverting; they raise always either horror or contempt, and hazard their highest interest, without even the low recompense of present applause.

That they hazard their highest interest can hardly be denied, when they determine, without the most scrupulous examination, those questions which relate to a future state ; and none certainly are less likely to discuss these questions with the care which they require, than those who accustom themselves to continual levity.

The mind long vitiated with trifles, and entertained with wild and unnatural combinations of ideas, becomes in a short time unable to support the fatigue of reasoning ; it is disgusted with a long succession of solemn images, and retires from serious meditation and tiresome labour to gayer fancies, and less difficult employments.

Besides, he that has practised the art of silencing others with a jest, in time learns to satisfy himself in the same manner. It becomes unnecessary to the tranquillity of his own mind to confute an objection ; it is sufficient for him if he can ridicule it.

Thus he soon grows indifferent to truth or falsehood, and almost incapable of discerning one from the other. He considers eternity itself as a subject for mirth, and is equally ludicrous upon all occasions.

What delusion, what bigotry is equal to this ? Men neglect to search after eternal happiness, for fear of being interrupted in their mirth. If others have been misled, they have been misled by their reverence for great authorities, or by strong prejudices of education. Such errors may be extenuated, and perhaps excused. They have, at least, something plausible to plead, and their assertors act with some show of reason : but what can the most

extensive charity allege in favour of those men who, if they perish everlastingly, perish by their attachment to merriment, and their confidence in a jest?

It is astonishing that any man can forbear inquiring seriously, whether there is a God; whether God is just; whether this life is the only state of existence; whether God has appointed rewards and punishments in a future state; whether he has given any laws for the regulation of our conduct here; whether he has given them by revelation; and whether the religion publicly taught carries any mark of divine appointment. These are questions which every reasonable being ought undoubtedly to consider with an attention suitable to their importance; and he, whom the consideration of eternal happiness or misery cannot awaken from his pleasing dreams, cannot prevail upon to suspend his mirth, surely ought not to despise others for dulness and stupidity.

Let it be remembered, that the nature of things is not alterable by our conduct. We cannot make truth; it is our business only to find it. No proposition can become more or less certain or important by being considered or neglected. It is to no purpose to wish, or to suppose, that to be false which is in itself true; and, therefore, to acquiesce in our own wishes and suppositions, when the matter is of eternal consequence, to believe obstinately without grounds of belief, and to determine without examination, is the last degree of folly and absurdity. It is not impossible that he who acts in this manner may obtain the approbation of madmen like himself, but he will incur the con-

tempt of every wise man ; and, what is more to be feared, amidst his security and supineness, his sallies and his flights, “ He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh him to scorn ; the Lord shall have him in derision.”

Thus have I endeavoured to give a faint idea of the folly of those who scoff at religion, because they disbelieve, and, by scoffing, harden themselves in their disbelief. But I shall be yet more unable to describe in a proper manner what I am to mention in the second place ;

The wickedness of those that believe religion, and yet deride it from motives of interest or vanity.

This is a degree of guilt against which it might seem, at the first view, superfluous to preach, because it might be thought impossible that it should ever be committed ; as, in ancient states, no punishment was decreed for the murderer of his father, because it was imagined to be a crime not incident to human nature. But experience taught them, and teaches us, that wickedness may swell beyond imagination, and that there are no limits to the madness of impiety.

For a man to revile and insult that God whose power he allows ; to ridicule that revelation of which he believes the authority divine ; to dare the vengeance of Omnipotence, and cry, “ Am not I in sport ? ” is an infatuation incredible, a degree of madness without a name. Yet there are men who, by walking after their own lusts, and indulging their passions, have reached this stupendous height of wickedness. They have dared to teach falsehoods

which they do not themselves believe, and to extinguish in others that conviction which they cannot suppress in themselves.

The motive of their proceeding is sometimes a desire of promoting their own pleasures, by procuring accomplices in vice. Man is so far formed for society, that even solitary wickedness quickly disgusts; and debauchery requires its combinations and confederacies, which, as intemperance diminishes their numbers, must be filled up with new proselytes.

Let those who practise this dreadful method of depraving the morals, and ensnaring the soul, consider what they are engaged in! Let them consider what they are promoting, and what means they are employing! Let them pause and reflect a little, before they do an injury that can never be repaired; before they take away what cannot be restored; before they corrupt the heart of their companion by perverting his opinions; before they lead him into sin; and, by destroying his reverence for religion, take away every motive to repentance, and all the means of reformation!

This is a degree of guilt before which robbery, perjury, and murder, vanish into nothing. No mischief, of which the consequences terminate in our present state, bears any proportion to the crime of decoying our brother into the broad way of eternal misery, and stopping his ears against that holy voice that recalls him to salvation.

What must be the anguish of such a man when he becomes sensible of his own crimes! How will he bear the thought of having promoted the damnation of multitudes by the propagation of known

delusions! What lasting contrition, what severe repentance, must be necessary for such deep and such accumulated guilt! Surely, if blood be required for blood, a soul shall be required for a soul.

There are others who deride religion for the sake of displaying their own imaginations, of following the fashion of a corrupt and licentious age, or gaining the friendship of the great or the applause of the gay. How mean must that wretch be, who can be overcome by such temptations as these! Yet there are men who sell that soul which God has formed for infinite felicity, defeat the great work of their redemption, and plunge into those pains which shall never end, lest they should lose the patronage of villains and the praise of fools.

I suppose those whom I am now speaking of to be in themselves sufficiently convinced of the truth of the Scriptures, and may, therefore, very properly lay before them the threatenings denounced by God against their conduct.

It may be useful to them to reflect betimes on the danger of “fearing man rather than God;” to consider that it shall avail a man nothing if he “gain the whole world and lose his own soul;” and that whoever “shall be ashamed of his Saviour before men, of him will his Saviour be ashamed before his Father which is in heaven.

That none of us may be in the number of those unhappy persons who thus scoff at the means of grace, and relinquish the hope of glory, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of that Saviour who hath brought life and immortality to light!

SERMON XXI.

PSALM CXLV. VERSE 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

IN this devout, masterly, and useful performance, the author appears deeply sensible of the divine greatness, and peculiarly transported with contemplating God's infinite goodness; even to that degree, that he cheerfully engages in, and absolutely devotes himself to, the very important service of adoring and obeying this almighty, unbounded, and most benevolent Being.

This his religion, as he intimates, was founded upon the most solid ground of reason; for as the great Father and Lord of all is certainly matchless, and unrivalled in majesty and in power, so is he disinterested, wonderful, and glorious, in bounty and compassion; averse and slow to anger, but ready to receive, to favour, and reward, all who diligently seek and faithfully serve him. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

In discoursing on this subject, I shall consider,

First, Some arguments that support or prove it.

Secondly, Illustrate its extensive signification and import in some remarkable instances, and conclude with a practical application.

First, I am to consider some arguments that establish this sentiment.

Our great Lord and Master has taught us, that “there is none good but one, that is God:” by which expression we may understand, that there is none so perfectly disinterested, so diffusively and so astonishingly good, as God is. For, in another place, he instructs us both how to comprehend, and rely on, this unchangeable and never-failing attribute of the divine nature; resembling it to, or representing it by, a human quality or virtue, namely, the affection and tender regard of parents to their children. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him!” From whence it is obvious to remark, that as the humane and generous man has a peculiar tenderness for his more immediate descendants, and, proportionally to his power and influence, is willing and active to succour and relieve the indigent, to divide care, lessen misery, and diffuse happiness through the world; inconceivably more affectionate is the eternal Parent unto, and regardful of, all his intelligent creatures; truly disposed, according to their rank of existence, to promote their welfare; and beyond comprehension inclined to conduct them, through the greatest variety of circumstances, to the noblest perfection, and the highest degree of felicity. In his righteous and benevolent nature there cannot possibly be the most distant tendency to caprice, severity, or selfishness; for the multitude of sharers, he knows, can never subtract from his inexhaustible fulness. He created to communicate. In every evil which he prevents, he is pleased; and in all

the good that he bestows, he glories. His goodness dictated the bestowing of existence, in all its forms and with all its properties. His goodness displays itself in sustaining and disposing of all things. His goodness connects unnumbered worlds together, in one spacious, vast, and unbounded universe, and embraces every system. "His tender mercies are over all his works."

Without goodness, what apprehensions could we entertain of all the other attributes of the Divine Being? Without the utmost extent of benevolence and mercy, they would hardly be perfections or excellences. And what would an universal administration produce, in the hands of an evil, or a partial, or malevolent direction, but scenes of horror and devastation? Not affliction and punishment for the sake of discipline and correction, to prevent the offence or reform the sinner; but heavy judgments and dreadful vengeance, to destroy him; or implacable wrath and fiery indignation, to prolong his misery, and extend the duration of his torture through the revolving periods of an endless eternity.

Without the most enlarged notions of an infinite and everlasting goodness in the divine nature, an impenetrable gloom must hang over every mind, and darkness overspread the whole face of being. Neither could any other conceivable sentiment disperse our suspicions, or banish one of our guilty or superstitious fears: for suppose he confined his goodness to a few, without any reasonable cause or just ground, and we could be so whimsically partial to ourselves as to conceit that we were of this select number; yet there could be no security of happiness, not even to this little flock. He that

chose them by chance, might as accidentally abandon them ; and, as the former was without reason or goodness, the latter might be without righteousness or mercy. Therefore it is infinitely desirable to think, and we are confident of the truth of our idea, that “ the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.”

For if he be self-existent, omnipotent, and possessed of perfect liberty ; if it be impossible for him ever to err, or mistake, in what is good and fitting ; and if he enjoys an infinite ability to effect, with a thought only, what shall always be for the greatest advantage, he must be originally and essentially, immutably, and for ever good.

Holy Scripture, as if beauty and goodness were synonymous terms or inseparable qualities, thus describes him : “ How great is thy goodness ! And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” And as if glory and goodness signified the same thing, you find, *Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19*, “ And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory.” To which the answer is, “ I will make all my goodness pass before thee.” And when, as it is written in the next chapter, the Lord descended, and proclaimed his name, or published the attributes in which he is peculiarly delighted, what is this distinguishing name, or what these divine and glorious attributes ? “ The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” The apostle sums up all these in one word, when he saith, “ God is love.” Which leads me to the second thing proposed,

Namely, to illustrate the extensive signification

and import of this subject by some remarkable instances. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

No bounds can be fixed to the divine presence, nor is any part of illimitable space without his inspection and active influence. There is nothing remote or obscure to him, nor any exceptions to his favour among all the works of his hands. Far and wide, then, as is the vast range of existence, so is the divine benevolence extended; and both in the previous trial and final retribution of all his rational and moral productions, "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

In the first place, to illustrate this, we need only to take a transient view of the outworks of the visible creation, a general survey of the nature and correspondence of the various parts of this regular and grand machine; this finished and stupendous fabric, in which every thing is contrived and concluded for the best.

For do but imagine an appetite or faculty altered, or a change in the object prepared to gratify it, in any respect. Suppose a material alteration, or considerable difference in nature, and we shall easily perceive it would be a manifold disadvantage, either to individuals or to the whole. Suppose the earth otherwise than it is, or the atmosphere and surrounding air to be varied, and in any degree more rarefied or more condensed: suppose the element of water greatly increased or considerably diminished; or the sun's blazing orb fixed nearer, and its vertical beams, therefore, stronger; or suppose it more remote, and its heat sensibly abated, the al-

teration would be a misfortune, if the difference did not terminate in misery and destruction : so that from the present adjustment, proportion, and accommodation of all matters in the wide creation, the consequence is fairly drawn, and very evident, that "God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

This is certain of the *whole* of God's works, and is peculiarly apparent in *man*, the principal inhabitant of this earth : for, as his welfare, dignity, and satisfaction, nay, his happiness, and even the end of his being, depend on, and arise from his regularity and constancy in virtue, what an infinite concern hath the Deity expressed about it ! What, that can consist with liberty, hath been omitted by supreme wisdom in this most important affair ? To incline him to be moderate in all his gratifications, true pleasure proceeds from nothing else. To keep off intemperate indulgence, and to guard him against all voluptuous excesses, it is so ordained, that extravagance and inconvenience are near together ; and that vice and pain are, though not immediate and inseparable associates, never far asunder ; and that it is impossible for that soul to be calm and at ease which iniquity has stained, and which impenitent guilt corrodes.

The parts of man's body are wonderfully designed and curiously constructed ; regularly disposed of, and most accurately-proportioned for the safety and advantage of the whole. As apt as we may be to quarrel with our nature, suppose an instinct was struck out of our frame, or a single passion taken from us ; suppose our senses any ways altered, by being either strengthened or impaired ; or even

reason refined and abstracted to such a degree as to render us wholly negligent of food and raiment, necessary exercises, and secular concerns; in any of these instances, the imaginary emendation would be a real deficiency, and a proportionable deduction from the moment and quantity of our happiness.

It is evidently the same with respect to all the other creatures we are acquainted with: their nature and condition, their qualities and circumstances, are so adapted to one another, that, as the intellectual powers of a being of a more exalted nature would not, probably, suit an inhabitant of this lower world, so neither would the capacities of human nature guide the fowls of the air, or conduct the beasts of the field, to so much happiness as they find by following the motions and impulses of sense and instinct: and if reflection, enlarged ideas, and moral discrimination be denied them, it is plainly, because they would be a burden and a misfortune, rather than a benefit to them.

But these universal notices and undeniable testimonies of divine goodness, throughout the animated regions of earth, sea, and air, in the propriety and suitableness of creatures to their state, and objects to their appetites, are too evident and obvious to all men to need enlargement. God's works are all wonderful; and in wisdom and with goodness hath he made them.

Secondly, This attribute is likewise illustriously displayed in the divine providence and government of the creation, though our faculties are too limited and scanty, and our views too narrow and imperfect, to trace its secret and mysterious ways.

An omnipotent support, and a perfectly wise direction, are evident in the laws established and regularly observed through all the divine productions in heaven above, or on the earth beneath: neither have the most celebrated philosophers been able, with all their boasted sagacity, and after all their laborious researches into the volume of nature, to assign any other cause but an invisible agency, an immediate energy of Providence, for mutual attraction in bodies, and the determination of all portions of matter to their centre; for the great strength of appetite, instinct, and sagacity in animals; that the prevalence and continuance thereof should be so precisely and exactly commensurate to the occasions which require them, and that they should be no longer urgent than for the time necessary, as in the affection for their young: all which do greatly illustrate the wisdom and goodness of God's administration and superintending care.

Holy writ elegantly and emphatically describes the excellence of goodness in the divine Providence in various places, particularly in this Psalm of which my text is a part. "The eyes of all wait upon thee; thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desires of every living thing." "Behold (saith our blessed Saviour) the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet, I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of those." Not one individual can be so minute and

inconsiderable, as to escape the notice of heaven's all-surveying eye ; nor one so importantly large and seemingly self-sufficient, as to subsist a moment without the divine support. By him all things consist : "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

But man appears the distinguished charge of the beneficent Creator ; and unless Providence had connected rational beings by the peculiar strong ties of mutual obligation, perpetual dependency, and inseparable interest, they would, of all creatures, be the most destitute and miserable ; for there is not one that, in the first stages of its existence, is so totally helpless and absolutely insufficient for its own preservation, support, or defence, as man : therefore, parental tenderness is both early and passionate, permanent and lasting. Our social dispositions and affections are enlarged to the utmost limits, and continue with us in the concluding decays and last end of this mortal life ; that we may always love one another, and glorify "the Lord, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works."

The consequences, in the last place, which result from the arguments you have heard, are so obvious, that I make no doubt but your own thoughts have already anticipated them. Ingratitude among men hath, in every age and in every region of the earth, been an object of general detestation, and universally accounted a glaring indication of depravity of heart. If the case stand thus among mortals, whose common interests require a reciprocation of kindness and beneficence, how greatly is the crime aggravated when it is committed against that Being

whose goodness towards the sons of men is perfectly disinterested ! The exertions of divine Providence in our behalf tend solely to our own welfare ; nor can any thing we do in return contribute, in the smallest degree, to the augmentation of the happiness of the almighty Benefactor. This, unquestionably, ought to be sufficient to exact from us the most profound veneration, the most fervent gratitude, and implicit obedience to his sacred laws.

David, after having enumerated the tender mercies of God, is penetrated with the strongest sense of devotion. “ My mouth (he exclaims) shall speak the praise of the Lord ; and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.” Such was the tribute which the royal Psalmist thought due to the Deity for the creation and preservation of man. The debt is accumulated to us in an infinite proportion ; for, while we are bounden to the same return for the same benefits voluntarily conferred upon us, a grander obligation is superadded to that, for the “ means of grace,” and for “ the hope of glory.” Were the mereies of the Lord limited to the tenure of our present existence, great and glorious as they are, the human mind would be clouded by the consciousness that a very few years must exclude us for ever from the participation of them : but since the gracious rays of life and immortality have dissipated the gloom that hung upon futurity ; since, by the propitiatory sacrifice of the Son of God, death is disarmed of his sting, and the grave deprived of its victory, divine goodness hath received its perfect consummation.

If gratitude, praise, and adoration, therefore, be due to the Author of our being for those blessings

which we enjoy at present ; it is no less our highest interest so to use them in this previous state of trial, that we may finally exchange them for those purer and incorruptible treasures reserved for the righteous in the kingdom of heaven.

Which that we may all do, may that God, who created and preserves us, grant, through the merits and mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ !

SERMON XXII.

1 CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER XI. VERSE 29.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.

THE celebration of the sacrament is generally acknowledged by the Christian church to be the highest act of devotion, and the most solemn part of positive religion; and has therefore most engaged the attention of those who either profess to teach the way to happiness, or endeavour to learn it; and, like all other subjects, frequently discussed by men of various interests, dispositions, and capacities, has given rise to various opinions widely different from each other.

Such is the weakness of mankind, that one error, whether admitted or detected, is very often the cause of another. Those who reject any opinion, however justly, are commonly incited by their zeal to condemn every position in which they discover any affinity with the tenets which they oppose, of which they have been long accustomed to show the falsehood and the danger, and therefore imagine themselves nearer to truth and safety, in proportion as they recede from them. For this reason it sometimes happens that, in passionate contests and disputations long continued, each controvertist succeeds in the confutation of his adversary's positions, and each fails in the establishment of his own.

In this manner have writers of different persuasions treated on the worthiness required of those who partake of the Lord's supper; a quality not only necessary to procure the favour of God, and to give efficacy to the institution, but so strictly enjoined in the words of the text, that to approach the holy table without it, is to pervert the means of salvation, and to turn prayer into sin.

The ardour and vehemence with which those are condemned who eat and drink unworthily, have filled the melancholy, the timorous, and the humble, with unnecessary terrors, which have been sometimes so much increased by the injudicious zeal of writers erroneously pious, that they have conceived the danger of attempting to obey this precept of our Saviour more formidable than that of neglecting it, and have spent the greatest part of their lives in the omission of a duty of the highest importance; or, being equally terrified on either hand, have lived in an anguish and perplexity, under a constant sense of the necessity of doing what they cannot, in their opinion, do in an acceptable manner, and which of course they shall either do or omit at the utmost hazard of eternal happiness.

Such exalted piety, such unshaken virtue, such an uniform ardour of divine affections, and such a constant practice of religious duties have been represented as so indispensably necessary to a worthy reception of this sacrament, as few men have been able to discover in those whom they most esteem for their purity of life, and which no man's conscience will, perhaps, suffer him to find in himself; and therefore, those who know themselves not to have arrived at such elevated excellence, who

struggle with passions which they cannot wholly conquer, and bewail infirmities which yet they perceive to adhere to them, are frightened from an act of devotion, of which they have been taught to believe, that it is so scarcely to be performed worthily by an embodied spirit, that it requires the holiness of angels, and the uncontaminated raptures of paradise.

Thus it appeared, that, instead of being excited to ardent desires of perfection, and unwearied endeavours after the utmost height of sanctity, not only the sensual and the profligate were hardened in their wickedness, by conceiving a life of piety too hard to be borne, but the diffident and scrupulous were terrified into despair, considered vigilance and caution as unavailing fatigues, remitted their ardour, relaxed their diligence, and ceased to pursue what they could no longer hope to attain.

To remove these doubts, and disperse these apprehensions, doctrines of very different tendency have been industriously promoted; lower degrees of piety have been declared sufficient, and the dangers of reception have been extenuated; nor have any arts of interpretation been untried, or any conjecture which sagacity or learning could produce, been forgotten, to assign to the words of the text a sense less to be dreaded by the unworthy communicant. But by these opinions, imprudently inculcated, many have been misled to consider the sacrament as little more than a cursory act of devotion; the exhortations of the apostle have lost their efficacy; and the terrors of the Lord, with which he enforces them, have no longer repressed the licentiousness of the profligate or disturbed the indolence of the supine; religion has sunk into

ceremony; God has, without fear, been approached with the lips when the heart has been far from him; and the supper of the Lord has been frequented by those of whom it could not be perceived that they were very solicitous to avoid the guilt of unworthy communication.

Thus have different interpretations of the same text produced errors equally dangerous, and which might have been equally obviated by a careful attention to the nature and institution of the sacrament, an unprejudiced examination of the position of the apostle, and the comparison of this passage with other comminations; methods of inquiry which, in the explication of doubtful texts of Scripture, ought always to be observed, and by which it may be proved, to the comfort of the depressed and the confirmation of the doubtful, that the sin of unworthy reception, though great, is yet to be pardoned; and to the restraint of the presumptuous and confusion of the profane, that the preparation required is strict, though practicable, and the denunciation such as ought to terrify the negligent, though not discourage the pious.

When eternal punishments are denounced against any crime, it is always evidently the intention of the writer to declare and enforce to those that are yet innocent, the duty of avoiding them; and to those who have already committed them, the necessity of repentance, reformation, and future caution: for it is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should repent and be saved. It is not by one act of wickedness that infinite mercy will be kindled to everlasting anger, and the beneficent Father of the universe for ever

alienated from his creatures ; but by a long course of crimes, deliberately committed against the convictions of conscience and the admonitions of grace ; by a life spent in guilt, and concluded without repentance. “ No drunkard or extortioner,” says the apostle, “ shall inherit eternal life.” Yet shall no man be excluded from future happiness by a single instance, or even by long habits, of intemperance or extortion. Repentance and new life will efface his crimes, reinstate him in the favour of his Judge, restore him to those promises which he has forfeited, and open the paths to eternal happiness.

Such is the crime of unworthy reception of the holy sacrament, by which “ he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself ;” to which no man can come unprepared, or partake of, if he is divested of the intentions suitable to so solemn a part of divine worship, without adding to the number of his sins, and, by a necessary consequence, to the danger of his soul. But though the soul is, by such an act of wickedness, endangered, it is not necessarily destroyed, or irreversibly condemned. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, contributes indeed, by eating and drinking, to his own damnation, as he that engages in fraudulent or unlawful commerce, may be said, with great propriety, to traffic for damnation, or to set his soul to sale ; yet as it is certain, that fraud is not unpardonable, if it shall afterwards give way to justice, so neither is the profanation of the sacrament a crime which the goodness of God cannot forgive, if it be succeeded by true devotion. The whole life of man is a state of probation ; he is always in danger, and may be al-

ways in hope. As no short fervours of piety, nor particular acts of beneficence, however exalted, can secure him from the possibility of sinking into wickedness ; so no neglect of devotion, nor the commission of any crimes, can preclude the means of grace, or the hope of glory. He that has eaten and drunk unworthily, may enter into salvation, by repentance and amendment ; as he that has eaten and drunk worthily, may, by negligence or presumption, perish everlastingly.

This account of the guilt of unworthy reception makes it necessary to inquire, whether by the original word in the text be meant, as it is translated, “ damnation,” the eternal punishments of a future state ; or, as it is more frequently interpreted, condemnation, temporary judgments, or worldly affliction : for, from either sense, the enormity of the crime, and the anger of God enkindled by it, is sufficiently apparent. Every act of wickedness that is punished with immediate vengeance, will, if it be aggravated by repetitions, or not expiated by repentance, incur *final* condemnation ; for temporal punishments are the merciful admonitions of God, to avoid, by a timely change of conduct, that state in which there is no repentance, and those pains which can have no end : so that the confident and presumptuous, though it should be allowed that only temporal punishments are threatened in the text, are to remember, that, without reformation, they will be only aggravations of the crime, and that, at the last day, those who could not be awakened to a just reverence of this divine institution, will be deprived of the benefits of that death, of which it was established as a perpetual com-
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moration. And those who are depressed by unnecessary terrors, may repel any temptations to despondency, by considering, that the crime of unworthy communication is, like all others, only unpardoned, where it is unrepented.

Having thus shown the danger incurred by an unworthy reception of the sacrament, it is necessary to inquire how it may be avoided; and to consider,

First, What it is to eat and drink unworthily.

Secondly, By what means a man may become a worthy partaker of the Lord's Supper.

First, I am to consider what it is to eat and drink unworthily.

The unworthiness, with which the Corinthians are upbraided by the apostle was, in part, such as the present regulated establishment of Christianity, and the assistance which religion receives from the civil power, make it unnecessary to censure, since it is not now committed even by the most presumptuous, negligent, or profane. It was a practice amongst them to assemble at the holy table in a tumultuous manner, and to celebrate the eucharist with indecency and riot. But though such open profanation of this sacred ordinance is not now to be apprehended, and therefore no man needs to be cautioned against it, yet the cause which produced it is such, as we cannot too anxiously fear, or too diligently avoid; for its influences are various and extensive, and often weaken the efficacy of the sacrament, though they produce no apparent disorders in the celebration of it.

The Corinthians fell into this enormous sin, says the apostle, "not discerning the Lord's body," for want of discerning the importance and sanctity of the institution, and of distinguishing the Lord's body from the common elements of bread and wine exhibited on common occasions of festive jollity. It is therefore the first duty of every Christian to discern the Lord's body, or to impress upon his mind a just idea of this act of commemoration, of the commands by which it is enforced, of the great sacrifice which it represents, and of the benefits which it produces. Without these reflections, often repeated, and made habitual by long and fervent meditation, every one will be in danger of "eating and drinking unworthily," of receiving the sacrament without sufficient veneration, without that ardent gratitude for the death of Christ, and that steady confidence in his merits, by which the sacrament is made efficacious to his salvation; for of what use can it be to commemorate the death of the Redeemer of mankind without faith, and without thankfulness? Such a celebration of the sacrament is nothing less than a mockery of God, an act by which we "approach him with our lips, when our hearts are far from him;" and as such insincerity and negligence cannot but be, in a very high degree, criminal, as he that eateth and drinketh thus unworthily cannot but promote his own damnation, it is necessary to inquire,

Secondly, By what means a man may become a worthy partaker of the Lord's Supper.

The method by which we are directed by the apostle to prepare ourselves for the sacrament, is

that of self-examination, which implies a careful regulation of our lives by the rules of the Gospel ; for to what purpose is our conduct to be examined, but that it may be amended where it appears erroneous and defective ? The duty of examination therefore is only mentioned, and repentance and reformation are supposed, with great reason, inseparable from it ; for nothing is more evident, than that we are to inquire into the state of our souls, as into affairs of less importance, with a view to avoid danger or to secure happiness. When we inquire, with regard to our faith, whether it be sufficiently vigorous or powerful, whether it regularly influences our conduct, restrains our passions, and moderates our desires ; what is intended by this duty, but that if we find ourselves Christians only in name, if we discover that the example of our divine Master has little force upon our constant conversation, and that God is seldom in our thoughts, except in the solemn acts of stated worship, we must then endeavour to invigorate our faith by returning frequently to meditate upon the object of it, our creation, our redemption, the means of grace, and the hope of glory ; and to enlighten our understandings, and awaken our affections, by the perusal of writings of piety, and, above all, of the holy Scriptures ?

If any man, in his examination of his life, discovers that he has been guilty of fraud, extortion, or injury to his neighbour, he is to make reparation to his utmost power. If he finds malice or hatred lurking in his mind, he must expel them by a strong resolution never to comply with their motions, or suffer them to break out in any real act of

revenge. If he observes that he is often betrayed, by passions or appetites, into unlawful methods of gratifying them, he must resolve to restrain them for the future, by watching and fasting, by a steady temperance and perpetual vigilance.

But let him beware of vain confidence in his own firmness, and implore, by fervent and sincere prayer, the cooperation of God's grace with his endeavours; for by grace alone can we hope to resist the numberless temptations that perpetually surround us; by grace only can we reject the solicitations of pleasure, repress the motions of anger, and turn away from the allurements of ambition. And this grace, when sincerely implored, is always granted in a degree sufficient for our salvation; and it ought, therefore, to be one of the first parts of our preparation for the sacrament, to press for that grace without which our examination itself will be useless, because without it no pious resolution can be formed, nor any virtue be practised.

As, therefore, it is only by an habitual and unrepented unworthiness that damnation is incurred, let no man be harassed with despondency for any past irreverence or coldness! As the sacrament was instituted for one of the means of grace, let no one who sincerely desires the salvation of his own soul neglect to receive it; and as eternal punishment is denounced by the apostle against all those who receive it unworthily, let no man approach the table of the Lord without repentance of his former sins, steadfast purposes of a new life, and full confidence in his merits whose death is represented by it.

SERMON XXIII.

(Preached on the 30th of January.)

JAMES, CHAP. III. VERSE 16.

Where envying and strife is, there is confusion.

THAT the life of man is unhappy, that his days are not only few but evil, that he is surrounded by dangers, distracted by uncertainties, and oppressed by calamities, requires no proof. This is a truth which every man confesses, or which he that denies it, denies against conviction. Accordingly, we find the miseries of our present state lamented by writers of every class, from the inspired teachers of religion, who admonish us of our frailty and infelicity, that they may incite us to labour after a better state, where "there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore," to the vainest and loosest author, whose design is to teach methods, not of improving, but of wasting time, and whose doctrine St. Paul, speaking in a borrowed character, has well expressed in one short sentence, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

When such is the condition of beings not brute and savage, but endowed with reason and united in society, who would not expect that they should join in a perpetual confederacy against the certain or fortuitous troubles to which they are exposed? that they should universally cooperate in the pro-

portion of universal felicity? that every man should easily discover that his own happiness is connected with that of every other man? that thousands and millions should continue together as partakers of one common nature? and that every eye should be vigilant, and every hand active, for the confirmation of ease and the prevention of misfortune.

This expectation might be formed by speculative wisdom, but experience will soon dissipate the pleasing illusion. A slight survey of life will show that, instead of hoping to be happy in the general felicity, every man pursues a private and independent interest, proposes to himself some peculiar convenience, and prizes it more, as it is less attainable by others.

When the ties of society are thus broken, and the general good of mankind is subdivided into the separate advantages of individuals, it must necessarily happen, that many will desire when few can possess, and consequently, that some will be fortunate by the disappointment or defeat of others; and, since no man suffers disappointment without pain, that one must become miserable by another's happiness.

This is however the natural condition of human life. As it is not possible for a being, necessitous and insufficient as man, to act wholly without regard to his interest, so it is difficult for him to place his interest at such a distance from him as to act with constant and uniform diligence, in hopes only of happiness flowing back upon him in its circulation through a whole community; to seek his own good, only by seeking the good of all others, of many whom he cannot know, and of many whom he can-

not love. Such a diffusion of interest, such sublimation of self-love, is to all difficult, because it so places the end at a great distance from the endeavour : it is to many impossible, because to many the end, thus removed, will be out of sight. And so great are the numbers of those whose views either nature has bounded, or corruption has contracted, that whoever labours only for the public will soon be left to labour alone, and driven from his attention to the universe, which his single care will very little benefit, to the inspection of his own business, and the prosecution of his private wishes. Every man has, in the present state of things, wants which cannot wait for public plenty, and vexations which must be quieted before the days of universal peace : and no man can live only for others, unless he could persuade others to live only for him.

The misery of the world, therefore, so far as it arises from the inequality of conditions, is incurable. There are desires which almost all feel, but which all cannot gratify. Every man may without a crime study his own happiness, if he be careful not to impede, by design, the happiness of others. In the race of life some must gain the prize, and others must lose it ; but the prize is honestly gained by him who outruns his competitor, without endeavouring to overthrow him.

In the prosecution of private interest, which Providence has either ordained or permitted, there must necessarily be some kind of strife. Where blessings are thrown before us, as the reward of industry, there must be a constant struggle of emulation. But this strife would be without confusion,

if it were regulated by reason and religion, if men would endeavour after lawful ends by lawful means.

But as there is a laudable desire of meliorating the condition of life which communities may not only allow, but encourage, as the parent of useful arts, by which first necessity was supplied, and conveniences will always be multiplied; as there is likewise an honest contention for preference and superiority, by which the powers of greater minds are pushed into action, and the ancient boundaries of science are overpassed; so there is likewise a strife, of a pernicious and destructive kind, which daily disturbs the quiet of individuals, and too frequently obstructs or disturbs the happiness of nations; a strife which always terminates in confusion, and which it is therefore every man's duty to avoid himself, and every man's interest to repress in others.

This "strife," of which cometh "confusion," the apostle has, in his prohibition, joined with envying; and daily experience will prove, that he has joined them with great propriety: for perhaps there has seldom been any great and lasting strife in the world, of which envy was not either the original motive or the most forcible incentive. The ravages of religious enthusiasts, and the wars kindled by difference of opinions, may perhaps be considered as calamities, which cannot properly be imputed to envy; yet even these may often be justly suspected of rising from no higher or nobler causes. A man convinced of the truth of his own tenets, wishing the happiness of others, and considering

happiness as the certain consequence of truth, is necessarily prompted to extend his opinions, and to fill the world with proselytes. But surely pure zeal cannot carry him beyond warm dispute and earnest exhortation; because by dispute and exhortation alone can *real* proselytes be made. Violence may extort confession from the tongue, but the mind must remain unchanged. Opinion, whether false or true, whether founded on evidence or raised by prejudice, stands equally unshaken in the tempests of commotion, and sets at defiance the flames of hostility and the sword of persecution.

No man, whose reason is not darkened by some inordinate perturbation of mind, can possibly judge so absurdly of beings, partakers of the same nature with himself, as to imagine that any opinion can be recommended by cruelty and mischief, or that he, who cannot perceive the force of argument, will be more efficaciously instructed by penalties and tortures. The power of punishment is to *silence*, not to *confute*: it therefore can never serve for the effectual propagation or obstruction of doctrines. It may indeed sometimes hinder the dissemination of falsehood and check the progress of error, but can never promote the reception of truth.

Whenever, therefore, we find the teacher jealous of the honour of his sect, and apparently more solicitous to see his opinions *established* than *approved*, we may conclude that he has added envy to his zeal, and that he feels more *pain from the want of victory*, than *pleasure from the enjoyment of truth*.

It is the present mode of speculation to charge these men with total hypocrisy, as wretches who

have no other design but that of temporal advancement, and consider religion only as one of the means by which power is gained or wealth accumulated. But this charge, whatever may have been the depravity of single persons, is by no means generally true. The persecutor and enthusiast have often been superior to the desire of worldly possessions, or, at least, have been abstracted from it by stronger passions. There is a kind of mercantile speculation, which ascribes every action to interest, and considers interest as only another name for pecuniary advantage. But the boundless variety of human affections is not to be thus easily circumscribed. Causes and effects, motives and actions, are complicated and diversified without end. Many men make party subservient to personal purposes; and many likewise suffer all private considerations to be absorbed and lost in their zeal for some public cause. But envy still operates, however various in its appearance, however disguised by specious pretences, or however removed from notice by intermediate causes. All violence, beyond the necessity of self-defence, is incited by the desire of humbling the opponents, and, whenever it is applied to the decision of religious questions, aims at conquest rather than conversion.

Since, therefore, envy is found to operate so often, and so secretly, and the *strife* which arises from it is certain to end in *confusion*, it is surely the duty of every man, who desires the prosperity of his country, as connected with a particular community or the general happiness of the world, as allied to general humanity,

First, To consider by what tokens he may discover in himself or others, that *strife* which springs from *envy* and ends in *confusion*.

Secondly, What are the evils produced by that confusion which proceeds from strife.

First, Let us consider by what tokens we may discover in ourselves or others, that "strife" which springs from "envy" and ends in "confusion."

That strife may well be supposed to proceed from some corrupt passion, which is carried on with vehemence disproportioned to the importance of the end openly proposed. Men naturally value ease and tranquillity at a very high rate, and will not, on very small causes, either suffer labour or excite opposition. When therefore any man voluntarily engages in tasks of difficulty, and incurs danger or suffers hardships, it must be imagined that he proposes to himself some reward more than equivalent to the comforts which he thus resigns, and of which he seems to triumph in the resignation; and if it cannot be found that his labours tend to the advancement of some end, worthy of so much assiduity, he may justly be supposed to have formed to himself some imaginary interest, and to seek his gratification, not in that which he himself gains, but which another loses.

It is a token that strife proceeds from unlawful motives when it is prosecuted by unlawful means. He that seeks only the right, and only for the sake of right, will not easily suffer himself to be transported beyond the just and allowed methods of attaining it. To do evil that good may come, can never be the purpose of a man who has not perverted

his morality by some false principle ; and false principles are not so often collected by the judgment as snatched up by the passions. The man whose duty gives way to his convenience, who, when once he has fixed his eye upon a distant end, hastens to it by violence over forbidden ground, or creeps on towards it through the crooked paths of fraud and stratagem, as he has evidently some other guide than the word of God, must be supposed to have likewise some other purpose than the glory of God or the benefit of man.

The evidence of corrupt designs is much strengthened, when unlawful means are used in preference to those which are recommended by reason and warranted by justice.

When that which would have been granted to request or yielded to remonstrance, is wantonly seized by sudden violence, it is apparent that violence is chosen for its own sake, and that the claimant pleases himself, not with the *possession*, but the *power* by which it was gained, and the mortification of him to whom his superiority has not allowed the happiness of choice, but has at once taken from him the honour of keeping and the credit of resigning.

There is another token that strife is produced by the predominance of some vicious passion, when it is carried on against natural or legal superiority. This token, though perhaps it is not very frequently fallacious, is not equally certain with the former ; because that superiority which nature gives, or institutions establish, too frequently incites insolence or oppression ; such insolence as may justly be restrained, and such oppression as may be lawfully

resisted. Many modes of tyranny have been practised in the world, of which it is more natural to ask with wonder, why they were submitted to so long, than why they were at last opposed and quelled. But if history and experience inform us that power and greatness grow wanton and licentious, that wealth and prosperity elate the mind, and enslave the understanding to desire, and when men once find that no one has power to control them, they are seldom very attentive to justice, or very careful to control themselves; history and experience will likewise show us, that the contrary condition has its temptations and its crimes; that he who considers himself as subject to another, and liable to suffer by caprice or wickedness, often anticipates the evils of his state, imagines himself to feel what he only fears, and imputes every failure of negligence or start of passion to studied tyranny and settled malevolence. To be inferior is necessarily displeasing; to be placed in a state of inferiority to those who have no eminent abilities or transcendent merit (which must happen in all political constitutions), increases the uneasiness; and every man finds in himself a strong inclination to throw down from their elevated state those whom he obeys without approbation, whom he reverences without esteem. When the passions are once in motion, they are not easily appeased or checked. He that has once concluded it lawful to resist power when it wants merit, will soon find a want of merit to justify his resistance of power.

Thus, if we consider the conduct of individuals towards each other, we shall commonly find the labourer murmuring at him who seems to live by

easier means : we shall hear the poor repining that others are rich, and even the rich speaking with malignity of those who are still richer than themselves.

And if we survey the condition of kingdoms and commonwealths, it will always be observed, that governors are censured, that every mischief of chance is imputed to ill designs, and that nothing can persuade mankind that they are not injured by an administration, either unskilful or corrupt. It is very difficult always to do right. To seem always to do right, to those who desire to discover wrong, is scarcely possible. Every man is ready to form expectations in his own favour such as never can be gratified, and which will yet raise complaints if they are disappointed.

Such is commonly the disposition with which men look upon those who are placed above them, and with such dispositions we cannot hope that they should be often pleased. Life is a state of imperfection ; and yet every man exacts from his superiors consummate wisdom and unfailing virtue ; and whenever he sees, or believes himself to see, either vice or error, thinks himself at liberty to loosen the ties of duty, and pass the boundaries of subordination, without considering that of such *strife* there must come *confusion*, or without knowing, what we shall consider,

Secondly, The evils and mischiefs produced by that *confusion* which arises from *strife*.

That the destruction of order, and the abolition of stated regulations, must fill the world with uncertainty, distraction, and solicitude, is apparent,

without any long deduction of argument. Yet it has too frequently happened, that those who either feel their wishes restrained, see their fortunes wearing away, or imagine their merit neglected, and their abilities employed upon business unworthy of their attention, desire times of tumult and disturbance, as affording the fairest opportunities for the active and sagacious to distinguish themselves, and as throwing open the avenues of wealth and honour, to be entered by those who have the greatest quickness of discernment and celerity of despatch. In times of peace every thing proceeds in a train of regularity, and there is no sudden advantage to be snatched, nor any unusual change of condition to be hoped; but when sedition and uproar have once silenced law and confounded property, then is the hour when chance begins to predominate in the world, when every man may hope without bounds, and those who know how to improve the lucky moment, may gain in a day what no length of labour could have procured without the concurrence of casual advantage.

This is the expectation which makes some hasten on confusion, and others look with concern at its approach. But what is this other than gaining by universal misery, supplying by force the want of right, and rising to sudden elevation by a sudden downfall of others?

The great benefit of society is, that the weak are protected against the strong; the great evil of confusion is, that the world is thrown into the hands, not of the best, but of the strongest; that all certainty of possession or acquisition is destroyed; that every man's care is confined to his

own interest ; and that general negligence of the general good makes way for general licentiousness.

Of the strife which this day brings back to our remembrance, we may observe, that it had all the tokens of *strife* proceeding from *envy*. The rage of the faction which invaded the rights of the church and monarchy, was disproportionate to the provocation received. The violence with which hostility was prosecuted, was more than the cause that was publicly avowed could incite or justify. Personal resentment was apparent in the persecution of particular men, and the bitterness of faction broke out in all the debates upon public questions. No securities could quiet suspicion, no concessions could satisfy exorbitance. Usurpation was added to usurpation ; demand was accumulated on demand ; and when war had decided against loyalty, insult was added to insult, and exaction to exaction.

As the end was unjust, the means likewise were illegal. The power of the faction commenced by clamour, was promoted by rebellion, and established by murder ; by murder of the most atrocious kind, deliberate, contumelious, and cruel ; by murder, not necessary even to the safety of those by whom it was committed, but chosen in preference to any other expedient for security.

This war certainly did not want the third token of strife proceeding from envy. It was a war of the rabble against their superiors ; a war, in which the lowest and basest of the people were encouraged by men a little higher than themselves to lift their hands against their ecclesiastical and civil governors,

and by which those who were grown impatient of obedience endeavoured to obtain the power of commanding.

This *strife*, as we all know, ended in *confusion*. Our laws were over-ruled; our rights were abolished; the soldier seized upon the property; the fanatic rushed into the church. The usurpers gave way to other usurpers; the schismatics were thrust out by other schismatics; the people felt nothing from their masters but alternatives of oppression, and heard nothing from their teachers but varieties of error.

Such was the *strife*, and such was the *confusion*. Such are the evils which God sometimes permits to fall upon nations, when they stand secure in their own greatness, and forget their dependence on universal sovereignty, depart from the laws of their Maker, corrupt the purity of his worship, or swerve from the truth of his revelation. Such evils surely we have too much reason to fear again, for we have no right to charge our ancestors with having provoked them by crimes greater than our own.

Let us, therefore, be warned by the calamities of past ages; and those miseries which are due to our sins let us avert by our penitence. "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon."

SERMON XXIV.

PROVERBS, CHAP. XXIX. VERSE 2.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.

THAT the institutions of government owe their original, like other human actions, to the desire of happiness, is not to be denied ; nor is it less generally allowed, that they have been perverted to very different ends from those which they were intended to promote. This is a truth which it would be very superfluous to prove by authorities or illustrate by examples. Every page of history, whether sacred or profane, will furnish us abundantly with instances of rulers that have deviated from justice, and subjects that have forgotten their allegiance ; of nations ruined by the tyranny of governors, and of governors overborne by the madness of the populace. Instead of a concurrence between governor and subjects for their mutual advantage, they seem to have considered each other, not as allies or friends, to be aided or supported, but as enemies, whose prosperity was inconsistent with their own, and who were therefore to be subdued by open force, or subjected by secret stratagems.

Thus have slavery and licentiousness succeeded one another, and anarchy and despotic power alternately prevailed. Virtue has, at one time, stood

exposed to the punishments of vice; and vice, at another time, enjoyed the security and privileges of virtue. Nor have communities suffered more, when they were exposed to the passions and caprices of one man, however cruel, ambitious, or insolent, than when all restraint has been taken off the actions of men by public confusions, and every one left at full liberty to indulge his own desires, and comply, without fear of punishment, with his wildest imaginations.

Man is, for the most part, equally unhappy, when subjected, without redress, to the passions of another, or left, without control, to the dominion of his own. This every man, however unwilling he may be to own it of himself, will very readily acknowledge of his neighbour. No man knows any one, except himself, whom he judges fit to be set free from the coercion of laws, and to be abandoned entirely to his own choice. By this consideration have all civilized nations been induced to the enactments of penal laws, laws by which every man's danger becomes every man's safety, and by which, though all are restrained, yet all are benefitted.

Government is therefore necessary, in the opinion of every one, to the safety of particular men and the happiness of society; and it may be considered as a maxim universally admitted, that *the people* cannot *rejoice*, except "the righteous are in authority;" that no public prosperity or private quiet can be hoped for, but from the justice and wisdom of those, to whom the administration of affairs and the execution of the laws is committed: for corrupt governments operate with equal force and

efficacy to the destruction of a people, as good governments to their preservation.

But that authority may never swell into tyranny or languish into supineness, and that subjection may never degenerate into slavery, nor freedom kindle into rebellion, it may be proper, both for those who are entrusted with power, and those from whom obedience is required, to consider,

First, How much it is the duty of those in authority to promote the happiness of the people.

Secondly, By what means the happiness of the people may be most effectually promoted.

Thirdly, How the people are to assist and further the endeavours of their governors.

First, How much it is the duty of those in authority to promote the happiness of the people.

If it be true in general that no man is born merely for his own sake, to consult his own advantage or pleasure, unconnected with the good of others; it is yet more evidently true of those who are exalted into high rank, dignified with honours, and vested with authority. Their superiority is not to be considered as a sanction for laziness or a privilege for vice. They are not to conceive that their passions are to be allowed a wider range, or their appetites set more free from subjection to reason, than those of others. They are not to consult their own glory at the expense of the lives of others; or to gratify their avarice, by plundering those whom diligence and labour have entitled to affluence. They are not to conceive that power gives a right to oppress, and to punish those who

murmur at oppression. They are to look upon their power and their greatness, as instruments placed in their hands to be employed for the public advantage. They are to remember they are placed upon an eminence, that their examples may be more conspicuous; and that therefore they must take care, lest they teach those vices which they ought to suppress. They must reflect, that it is their duty to secure property from the attempts of rapine and robbery; and that those whom they protect will be very little benefitted by their care, if what they rescue from others they take away themselves.

It appears from those struggles for dominion which have filled the world with war, bloodshed, and desolation, and have torn in pieces almost all the states and kingdoms of the earth, and from those daily contests for subordinate authority which disturb the quiet of smaller societies, that there is somewhat in power more pleasing than in any other enjoyment; and, consequently, to bestow upon man the happiness of ruling others, is to bestow upon him the greatest benefit he is capable of receiving. Nothing then can equal the obligation of governors to the people, and nothing but the most flagrant ingratitude can make them careless of the interests, or unconcerned at the misfortunes, of those to whom they owe that, for which no danger has been thought too dreadful to be encountered, no labour too tedious to be undergone, and no crime too horrible to be committed.

Gratitude is a species of justice. He that requites a benefit may be said, in some sense, to pay

a debt ; and, of course, he that forgets favours received, may be accused of neglecting to pay what he cannot be denied to owe. But this is not the only sense in which justice may be said to require from a governor an attention to the wants and petitions of the people. He that engages in the management of public business, takes a trust upon him which it was in his power to decline, and which he is therefore bound to discharge with diligence and fidelity ; a trust which is of the highest honour, because it is of the greatest difficulty and importance ; a trust which includes not only the care of the property, but of the morals of the people.

It is with the justest reason that large revenues, pompous titles, and all that contributes to the happiness of life, are annexed to these high offices ; for what reward can be too great for him, to whom multitudes are indebted for the secure enjoyment of their possessions ? for him, whose authority checks the progress of vice, and assists the advancement of virtue, restrains the violence of the oppressor, and asserts the cause of the injured ? These are, doubtless, merits above the common rate ; merits which can hardly be too loudly celebrated or too liberally rewarded.

But it is always to be observed, that he only deserves the recompense who performs the work for which it is proposed ; and that he who wears the honours, and receives the revenues, of an exalted station, without attending to the duties of his post, is, in a very high degree, criminal, both in the eye of God and man.

It is, therefore, the certain and apparent duty of

those that are in authority to take care that the people may rejoice, and diligently to inquire, what is to be considered,

Secondly, By what means the happiness of the people may be most effectually promoted.

In political, as well as natural disorders, the greater error of those who commonly undertake either cure or preservation, is, that they rest in second causes, without extending their search to the remote and original sources of evil. They, therefore, obviate the immediate evil, but leave the destructive principle to operate again; and have their work for ever to begin, like the husbandman who mows down the heads of noisome weeds, instead of pulling up the roots.

The only uniform and perpetual cause of public happiness is public virtue. The effects of all other things which are considered advantages will be found casual and transitory. Without virtue, nothing can be securely possessed or properly enjoyed.

In a country like ours, the great demand, which is for ever repeated to our governors, is for the security of property, the confirmation of liberty, and the extension of commerce. All this we have obtained, and all this we possess, in a degree which, perhaps, was never granted to any other people: yet we still find something wanting to our happiness, and turn ourselves round on all sides, with perpetual restlessness, to find that remedy for our evils which neither power nor policy can afford.

That established property and inviolable freedom

are the greatest of political felicities, no man can be supposed likely to deny. To depend on the will of another, to labour for that, of which arbitrary power can prohibit the enjoyment, is the state to which want of reason has subjected the brute. To be happy, we must know our own rights; and we must know them to be safe.

But though this knowledge be necessary to happiness, this knowledge is not sufficient. Liberty, if not regulated by virtue, can be only licence to do evil; and property, if not virtuously enjoyed, can only corrupt the possessor, and give him the power to injure others. Trade may make us rich; but riches, without goodness, cannot make us happy.

Let us, however, suppose that these external goods have that power which wisdom cannot believe, and which experience never could confirm; let us suppose that riches and liberty could make us happy. It then remains to be considered, how riches and liberty can be secured. To this the politician has a ready answer, that they are to be secured by laws wisely formed and vigorously executed. But, as laws can be made only by a small part of an extensive empire, and must be executed by a part yet far smaller, what shall protect us against the laws themselves? And how shall we be certain that they shall not be made without regard to the public good, or shall not be perverted to oppression by the ministers of justice?

But if prosperity, and laws, by which, as far as the mutability of this world permits, that prosperity is made permanent and safe, cannot make the people happy, what is it the governors can do? How far is their care to be extended, and what more can

skill and vigilance perform? The wisdom of mankind has been exercised in inquiries how riches may be gained and kept; how the different claims of men may be adjusted without violence; and how one part of the community may be restrained from encroachments on the other. For this end governments have been instituted, in all their various forms, with much study, and too often with much bloodshed. But what is the use of all this, if, when these ends are obtained, there is yet so much wanting to felicity?

I am far from intending to insinuate, that the studies of political wisdom, or the labours of legislative patriotism, have been vain and idle. They are useful, but not effectual; they are conducive to that end, which yet they cannot fully gain. The legislator, who does what human power can attain towards the felicity of his fellow creatures, is not to be censured, because, by the imbecility of all human endeavours, he fails of his purpose; unless he has become culpable, by ascribing too much to his own powers, and arrogated to his industry or his wit, that efficacy which wit and industry must always want, unless some higher power lends them assistance, and cooperates with them.

The husbandman may plough his fields with industry, and sow them with skill; he may manure them copiously, and fence them carefully: but the harvest must depend at last on celestial influence; and all his diligence is frustrated, unless the sun sheds its warmth, and the clouds pour down their moisture.

Thus, in all human affairs, when prudence and industry have done their utmost, the work is left

to be completed by superior agency; and in the security of peace and stability of possession, our policy must at last call for help upon religion.

Human laws, however honestly instituted, or however vigorously enforced, must be limited in their effect, partly by our ignorance, and partly by our weakness. Daily experience may convince us that all the avenues by which injury and oppression may break in upon life, cannot be guarded by positive prohibitions. Every man sees, and may feel, evils which no law can punish. And not only will there always remain possibilities of guilt, which legislative foresight cannot discover, but the laws will be often violated by wicked men, whose subtlety eludes detection, and whom, therefore, vindictive justice cannot bring within the reach of punishment.

These deficiencies in civil life can be supplied only by religion. The mere observer of human laws avoids only such offences as the laws forbid, and those only when the laws can detect his delinquency. But he who acts with the perpetual consciousness of the Divine Presence, and considers himself as accountable for all his actions to the irreversible and unerring judgment of Omniscience, has other motives of action, and other reasons of forbearance. He is equally restrained from evil in public life and in secret solitude; and has only one rule of action, by which "he does to others what he would that others should do to him;" and wants no other enforcement of his duty, than the fear of future punishment and the hope of future rewards.

The first duty, therefore, of a governor is to dif-

fuse through the community a spirit of religion ; to endeavour that a sense of the divine authority should prevail in all orders of men, and that the laws should be obeyed, in subordination to the universal and unchangeable edicts of the Creator and Ruler of the world.

How religion may be most effectually promoted, is an inquiry which every governor ought diligently to make ; and he that inquires, with real wishes for information, will soon know his duty ; for Providence has seldom made the same things necessary and abstruse.

That religion may be invigorated and diffused, it is necessary that the external order of religion be diligently maintained, that the solemnities of worship be duly observed, and a proper reverence preserved for the times and the places appropriated to piety. The appropriations of time and place are indeed only means to the great end of holiness ; but they are means without which the end cannot be obtained ; and every man must have observed how much corruption prevails where the attention to public worship and to holy seasons is broken or relaxed.

Those that have in their hands the disposal of riches or honours, ought to bestow them on persons who are most eminent for sanctity of life : for though no man ought to consider temporary goods as the proper rewards of religious duties, yet they who have them to give are obliged to distribute them in such a manner as may make them most useful to the public ; and they will be most useful, when they increase the power of beneficence and enlarge the influence of piety.

It yet remains that governors cooperate with their laws by their own examples, and that as, by their height of place, they are always conspicuous, they exhibit to those eyes which are turned upon them "the beauty of holiness."

The present state of the world; however, affords us little hope that virtue can, by any government, be so strongly impressed, or so widely diffused, as to supersede the necessity of suppressing wickedness. In the most diligent cultivation of the happiest soil, weeds will sometimes appear among fruits and flowers; and all that vigilance and labour can do is to check them as they rise. However virtue may be encouraged or rewarded, it can never appear to all minds the shortest means of present good. There will always be those who would rather grow rich by fraud than by diligence, and who will provide for vicious pleasures by violence rather than by labour. Against the attempts and artifices of such men, whence have simplicity and innocence their defence and security? Whence but from the *lex armata*, the vindictive law, that stands forth the champion of the weak and the protectress of the innocent.

Nor is quiet and security in danger only from corrupt minds; for honest and beneficent men might often, were not the law to interpose, disturb society, and fill the country with violence. Two men, both of them wise, and both of them virtuous, may lay claim to the same possession, with pretensions, to the world specious, in their own thoughts just. Such disputes can be terminated only by force or law. Of force, it is apparent that the exertion of it is an immediate evil, and that pre-

valence at last will be no proof of justice. Of the law, the means are gentle and inoffensive, and the conclusion not only the confirmation of property, but the establishment of right. For this power of the law virtue itself will leave employment; for though crimes would hardly be committed but by predominance of passion, yet litigation must always subsist while there is difference of opinion. We can hope but faintly for the time when all men shall be honest; but the time seems still more remote in which all men shall be wise: and until we may be able to settle all claims for ourselves, let us rejoice that there is law to adjust them for us.

The care, however, of the best governor may be frustrated by disobedience and perverseness; and the best laws may strive in vain against radicated wickedness.

It is therefore fit to consider,

Thirdly, How the people are to assist and further the endeavours of their governors.

As all government is power exerted by few upon many, it is apparent that nations cannot be governed but by their own consent. The first duty, therefore, of subjects is obedience to the laws; such obedience as is the effect, not of compulsion, but of reverence; such as arises from a conviction of the instability of human virtue, and of the necessity of some coercive power, which may restrain the exorbitancies of passion, and check the career of natural desires.

No man thinks laws unnecessary for others; and no man, if he considers his own inherent frailty, can justly think them unnecessary for himself. The

wisest man is not always wise; and the best man is not always good. We all sometimes want the admonition of law, as supplemental to the dictates of reason and the suggestions of conscience: and he that encourages irreverence in himself or others, to public institutions, weakens all the human securities of peace and all the corroborations of virtue.

That the proper influence of government may be preserved, and that the liberty which a just distribution of power naturally supports may not operate to its destruction, it is always to be remembered, that even the errors and deficiencies of authority must be treated with respect. All institutions are defective by their nature, and all rulers have their imperfections like other men: but, as not every failing makes a bad man, so not every error makes a bad government; and he that considers how few can properly adjust their own houses, will not wonder that into the multiplicity of national affairs deception or negligence should sometimes find their way. It is likewise necessary to remember, that as government is difficult to be administered, it is difficult to be understood; and that where very few have capacity to judge, very few have a right to censure.

The happiness of a nation must arise from the combined endeavours of governors and subjects. The duties of governing can be the lot of few, but all of us have the duties of subjects to perform; and every man ought to incite in himself and in his neighbour, that obedience to the laws, and that respect to the chief magistrate, which may secure and promote concord and quiet. Of this, as of all

other virtues, the true basis is religion. The laws will be easily obeyed by him who adds to human sanctions the obligations of conscience; and he will not easily be disposed to censure his superiors, whom religion has made acquainted with his own failings.

SERMON XXV.

Written by Dr. Johnson for the Funeral of his Wife.

JOHN, CHAP. XI. VERSE 25, 26 (FORMER PART.)

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.

To afford adequate consolations to the last hour, to cheer the gloomy passage through the valley of the shadow of death, and to ease that anxiety to which beings prescient of their own dissolution, and conscious of their own danger, must be necessarily exposed, is the privilege only of revealed religion. All those to whom the supernatural light of heavenly doctrine has never been imparted, however formidable for power or illustrious for wisdom, have wanted that knowledge of their future state, which alone can give comfort to misery or security to enjoyment; and have been forced to rush forwards to the grave through the darkness of ignorance; or, if they happened to be more refined and inquisitive, to solace their passage with the fallacious and uncertain glimmer of philosophy.

There were, doubtless, at all times, as there are now, many who lived with very little thought concerning their end; many whose time was wholly filled up by public or domestic business, by the pursuits of ambition or the desire of riches; many who dissolved themselves in luxurious enjoyment, and, when they could lull their minds by any present pleasure, had no regard to distant events, but withheld their imagination from sallying out into futurity, or catching any terror that might interrupt their quiet; and there were many who rose so little above animal life, that they were completely engrossed by the objects about them, and had their views extended no further than to the next hour; in whom the ray of reason was half extinct, and who had neither hopes nor fears, but of some near advantage, of some pressing danger.

But multitudes there must always be, and greater multitudes as arts and civility prevail, who cannot wholly withdraw their thoughts from death. All cannot be distracted with business, or stunned with the clamours of assemblies or the shouts of armies: all cannot live in the perpetual dissipation of successive diversions, nor will all enslave their understandings to their senses, and seek felicity in the gross gratifications of appetite. Some must always keep their reason and their fancy in action, and seek either honour or pleasure from intellectual operations; and from them others, more negligent or sluggish, will be in time fixed or awakened; knowledge will be perpetually diffused, and curiosity hourly enlarged.

But when the faculties were once put in motion,

when the mind had broken loose from the shackles of sense, and made excursions to remote consequences, the first consideration that would stop her course must be the incessant waste of life, the approach of age, and the certainty of death; the approach of that time, in which strength must fail and pleasure fly away, and the certainty of that dissolution which shall put an end to all the prospects of this world. It is impossible to think, and not sometimes to think on death. Hope, indeed, has many powers of delusion; whatever is possible, however unlikely, it will teach us to promise ourselves: but death no man has escaped, and therefore no man can hope to escape it. From this dreadful expectation no shelter or refuge can be found. Whatever we see, forces it upon us; whatever is, new or old, flourishing or declining, either directly, or by a very short deduction, leads man to the consideration of his end; and accordingly we find that the fear of death has always been considered as the great enemy of human quiet, the polluter of the feast of happiness, and imbitterer of the cup of joy. The young man who rejoiceth in his youth, amidst his music and his gaiety, has always been disturbed with the thought that his youth will be quickly at an end. The monarch, to whom it is said that he is a god, has always been reminded by his own heart, that he shall die like man.

This unwelcome conviction, which is thus continually pressed upon the mind, every art has been employed to oppose. The general remedy, in all ages, has been to chase it away from the present

moment, and to gain a suspense of the pain that could not be cured. In the ancient writings we, therefore, find the shortness of life frequently mentioned as an excitement to jollity and pleasure; and may plainly discover, that the authors had no other means of relieving that gloom with which the uncertainty of human life clouded their conceptions. Some of the philosophers, indeed, appear to have sought a nobler and a more certain remedy, and to have endeavoured to overpower the force of death by arguments, and to dispel the gloom by the light of reason. They inquired into the nature of the soul of man, and showed, at least probably, that it is a substance distinct from matter, and, therefore, independent on the body, and exempt from dissolution and corruption. The arguments, whether physical or moral, upon which they established this doctrine, it is not necessary to recount to a Christian audience, by whom it is believed upon more certain proofs and higher authority; since, though they were such as might determine the calm mind of a philosopher, inquisitive only after truth, and uninfluenced by external objects, yet they were such as required leisure and capacity not allowed in general to mankind; they were such as many could never understand, and of which, therefore, the efficacy and comfort were confined to a small number, without any benefit to the unenlightened multitude.

Such has been hitherto the nature of philosophical arguments, and such it must, probably, for ever remain; for though, perhaps, the successive industry of the studious may increase the number,

or advance the probability, of arguments; and though continual contemplation of matter will, I believe, show it, at length, wholly incapable of motion, sensation, or order, by any powers of its own, and therefore necessarily establish the immateriality, and, probably, the immortality of the soul; yet there never can be expected a time, in which the gross body of mankind can attend to such speculations or can comprehend them; and, therefore, there never can be a time in which this knowledge can be taught in such a manner as to be generally conducive to virtue or happiness, but by a messenger from God, from the Creator of the world, and the Father of spirits.

To persuade common and uninstructed minds to the belief of any fact, we may every day perceive that the testimony of one man, whom they think worthy of credit, has more force than the arguments of a thousand reasoners, even when the arguments are such as they may be imagined completely qualified to comprehend. Hence it is plain, that the constitution of mankind is such, that abstruse and intellectual truths can be taught no otherwise than by positive assertion, supported by some sensible evidence, by which the assertor is secured from the suspicion of falsehood; and that if it should please God to inspire a teacher with some demonstration of the immortality of the soul, it would far less avail him for general instruction, than the power of working a miracle in its vindication, unless God should, at the same time, inspire all the hearers with docility and apprehension, and turn, at once, all the sensual, the giddy, the lazy,

the busy, the corrupt, and the proud, into humble, abstracted, and diligent philosophers.

To bring life and immortality to light ; to give such proofs of our future existence as may influence the most narrow mind, and fill the most capacious intellect ; to open prospects beyond the grave, in which the thought may expatiate without obstruction ; and to supply a refuge and support to the mind amidst all the miseries of decaying nature, is the peculiar excellence of the Gospel of Christ. Without this heavenly instructor, he who feels himself sinking under the weight of years, or melting away by the slow waste of a lingering disease, has no other remedy than obdurate patience, a gloomy resignation to that which cannot be avoided ; and he who follows his friend, or whoever there is yet dearer than a friend, to the grave, can have no other consolation than that which he derives from the general misery ; the reflection, that he suffers only what the rest of mankind must suffer ; a poor consideration, which rather awes us to silence than soothes us to quiet, and which does not abate the sense of our calamity, though it may sometimes make us ashamed to complain.

But so much is our condition improved by the Gospel, so much is the sting of death rebated, that we may now be invited to the contemplation of our mortality, as to a pleasing employment of the mind, to an exercise delightful and recreative ; not only when calamity and persecution drive us out from the assemblies of men, and sorrow and wo represent the grave as a refuge and an asylum ; but even in the hours of the highest earthly prosperity, when

our cup is full, and when we have laid up stores for ourselves ; for, in him who believes the promise of the Saviour of the world, it can cause no disturbance to remember, that this night his soul may be required of him ; and he who suffers one of the sharpest evils which this life can show, amidst all its varieties of misery ; he that has lately been separated from the person whom a long participation of good and evil had endeared to him ; he who has seen kindness snatched from his arms, and fidelity torn from his bosom ; he whose ear is no more to be delighted with tender instruction, and whose virtue shall be no more awakened by the seasonable whispers of mild reproof ; may yet look, without horror, on the tomb which encloses the remains of what he loved and honoured, as upon a place which, if it revives the sense of his loss, may calm him with the hope of that state in which there shall be no more grief or separation.

To Christians the celebration of a funeral is by no means a solemnity of barren and unavailing sorrow, but established by the church for other purposes.

First, for the consolation of sorrow : secondly, for the enforcement of piety. The mournful solemnity of the burial of the dead is instituted, first, for the consolation of that grief to which the best minds, if not supported and regulated by religion, are most liable. They who most endeavour the happiness of others, who devote their thoughts to tenderness and pity, and studiously maintain the reciprocation of kindness, by degrees mingle their souls in such a manner, as to feel from their sepa-

ration a total destitution of happiness, a sudden abruption of all their prospects, a cessation of all their hopes, schemes, and desires. The whole mind becomes a gloomy vacuity, without any image or form of pleasure, a chaos of confused wishes, directed to no particular end, or to that which, while we wish we cannot hope to obtain; for the dead will not revive; those whom God has called away from the present state of existence, can be seen no more in it; we must go to them, but they cannot return to us.

Yet, to show that grief is vain is to afford very little comfort; yet this is all that reason can afford; but religion, our only friend in the moment of distress, in the moment when the help of man is vain, when fortitude and cowardice sink down together, and the sage and the virgin mingle their lamentations; religion will inform us that sorrow and complaint are not only vain, but unreasonable and erroneous. The voice of God, speaking by his Son and his apostles, will instruct us, that she, whose departure we now mourn, is not dead, but sleepeth; that only her body is committed to the ground, but that the soul is returned to God who gave it; that God, who is infinitely merciful, who hateth nothing that he has made, who desireth not the death of a sinner; to that God who only can compare performance with ability, who alone knows how far the heart has been pure or corrupted, how inadvertency has surprised, fear has betrayed, or weakness has impeded; to that God who marks every aspiration after a better state, who hears the prayer which the voice cannot utter, records the

purpose that perished without opportunity of action, the wish that vanished away without attainment; who is always ready to receive the penitent, to whom sincere contrition is never late, and who will accept the tears of a returning sinner.

Such are the reflections to which we are called by the voice of truth; and from these we shall find that comfort which philosophy cannot supply, and that peace which the world cannot give. The contemplation of the mercy of God may justly afford some consolation, even when the office of burial is performed to those who have been snatched away without visible amendment of their lives: for, who shall presume to determine the state of departed souls, to lay open what God hath concealed, and to search the counsels of the Most Highest?—But, with more confident hope of pardon and acceptance may we commit those to the receptacles of mortality, who have lived without any open or enormous crimes; who have endeavoured to propitiate God by repentance, and have died, at last, with hope and resignation. Among these she surely may be remembered whom we have followed hither to the tomb, to pay her the last honours, and to resign her to the grave: she, whom many who now hear me have known, and whom none who were capable of distinguishing either moral or intellectual excellence, could know without esteem or tenderness. To praise the extent of her knowledge, the acuteness of her wit, the accuracy of her judgment, the force of her sentiments, or the elegance of her expression, would ill suit with the occasion.

Such praise would little profit the living, and as

little gratify the dead, who is now in a place where vanity and competition are forgotten for ever; where she finds a cup of water given for the relief of a poor brother, a prayer uttered for the mercy of God to those whom she wanted power to relieve, a word of instruction to ignorance, a smile of comfort to misery, of more avail than all those accomplishments which confer honour and distinction among the sons of folly.—Yet, let it be remembered that her wit was never employed to scoff at goodness, nor her reason to dispute against truth. In this age of wild opinions she was as free from scepticism as the cloistered virgin: she never wished to signalize herself by the singularity of paradox: she had a just diffidence of her own reason, and desired to practise rather than dispute. Her practice was such as her opinions naturally produced: she was exact and regular in her devotions, full of confidence in the divine mercy, submissive to the dispensations of Providence, extensively charitable in her judgments and opinions, grateful for every kindness that she received, and willing to impart assistance of every kind to all whom her little power enabled her to benefit: she passed through many months of languor, weakness, and decay, without a single murmur of impatience, and often expressed her adoration of that mercy which granted her so long time for recollection and penitence. That she had no failing cannot be supposed: but she has now appeared before the Almighty Judge; and it would ill become beings like us, weak and sinful as herself, to remember those faults which, we trust, eternal purity has pardoned.

Let us, therefore, preserve her memory for no other end but to imitate her virtues; and let us add her example to the motives to piety which this solemnity was, secondly, instituted to enforce.

It would not, indeed, be reasonable to expect, did we not know the inattention and perverseness of mankind, that any one who had followed a funeral, could fail to return home without new resolutions of a holy life; for who can see the final period of all human schemes and undertakings, without conviction of the vanity of all that terminates in the present state? For who can see the wise, the brave, the powerful, or the beauteous, carried to the grave, without reflection on the emptiness of all those distinctions which set us here in opposition to each other? And who, when he sees the vanity of all terrestrial advantages, can forbear to wish for a more permanent and certain happiness? Such wishes, perhaps, often arise, and such resolutions are often formed; but, before the resolution can be exerted, before the wish can regulate the conduct, new prospects open before us, new impressions are received, the temptations of the world solicit, the passions of the heart are put into commotion; we plunge again into the tumult, engage again in the contest, and forget that what we gain cannot be kept, and that the life for which we are thus busy to provide, must be quickly at an end.

But let us not be thus shamefully deluded! Let us not thus idly perish in our folly by neglecting the loudest call of Providence; nor, when we have followed our friends and our enemies to the tomb, suffer ourselves to be surprised by the dreadful

summons, and die, at last, amazed and unprepared ! Let every one, whose eye glances on this bier, examine what would have been his condition if the same hour had called him to judgment ; and remember, that though he is now spared, he may, perhaps, be to-morrow among separate spirits. The present moment is in our power : let us, therefore, from the present moment begin our repentance ! Let us not any longer harden our hearts, but hear this day the voice of our Saviour and our God, and begin to do, with all our powers, whatever we shall wish to have done when the grave shall open before us ! Let those who came hither weeping and lamenting, reflect, that they have not time for useless sorrow ; that their own salvation is to be secured, and that “ the day is far spent, and the night cometh, when no man can work ; ” that tears are of no value to the dead, and that their own danger may justly claim their whole attention ! Let those who entered this place unaffected and indifferent, and whose only purpose was to behold this funeral spectacle, consider that she whom they thus behold with negligence and pass by, was lately partaker of the same nature with themselves ; and that they, likewise, are hastening to their end, and must soon, by others equally negligent, be buried and forgotten ! Let all remember that the day of life is short, and that the day of grace may be much shorter ; that this may be the last warning which God will grant us, and that, perhaps, he who looks on this grave unalarmed, may sink unreformed into his own !

Let it, therefore, be our care, when we retire

from this solemnity, that we immediately turn from our wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right; that whenever disease or violence shall dissolve our bodies, our souls may be saved alive, and received into everlasting habitations; where, with angels and archangels, and all the glorious host of heaven, they shall sing glory to God on high, and the Lamb, for ever and ever!

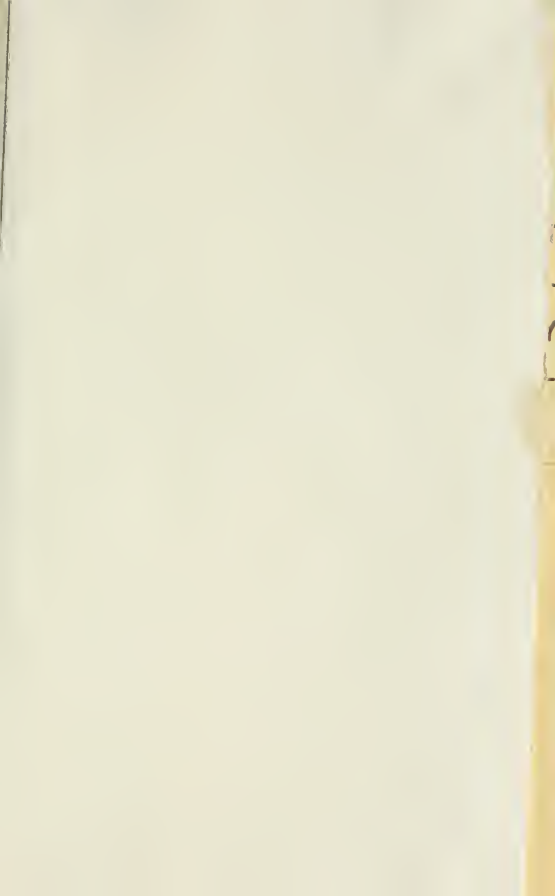
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THE END.



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